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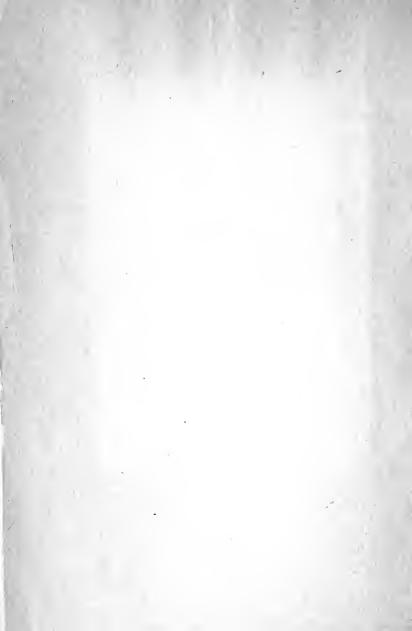
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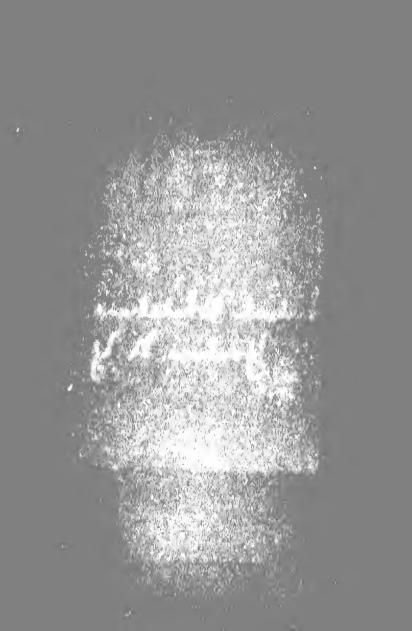
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Front

EVIDENTLY AFRAID OF MOVING.

REAL GRIT

 $\mathbf{B}\mathbf{Y}$

SILAS K. HOCKING

AUTHOR OF
"HER BENNY," "HIS FATHER," "IVY," "CHIPS," "POOR MIKE,"
ETC.

WITH ORIGINAL ILLUSTRATIONS



LONDON
FREDERICK WARNE AND CO.
AND NEW YORK



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"REAL GRIT."

CHAPTER I.

FATHER AND SON.

"ELL, Jack, and what have you been doing with yourself to-day?"

"Wel-l, my most affectionate pater," said the young man, with a drawl and a yawn, "I have been doing my level best, as the Yankees would say, to kill time."

"To kill time, eh?" said the father, lifting his eyebrows; "that is scarcely a paying business."

"Well, no; I guess you are right," drawled the young man, "especially as I haven't succeeded very well at it."

"Do you find time to hang so heavily on your hands, then?" said the father, with just a suspicion of concern in the tone of his voice.

"Well, rather," said the young man, with another yawn "Fact is, I think it's time I went to business."

"Oh, nonsense," answered the father, quickly. "I do not want you to be worried with the cares of business. You should enjoy yourself while you have the opportunity.

Invite some of your college chums to spend a few days with you at Ryecroft, and make merry in the sunshine."

"Is there any fear of a storm coming on?" was the languid and careless answer. But the young man did not lift his eyes to his father's face as he spoke, or he might have noticed the sharp spasm of pain that swept swiftly across it.

Robert Formby did not reply for several seconds, and when he did so he had quite recovered his composure.

"You shouldn't talk of storms, Jack," he said. "When I die, I expect you will be the richest young fellow in the whole district."

"And you, my dear old dad, should not talk about dying," was the quick rejoinder. "And what is more—now that we are fairly in for a talk—what is the use of worriting your life out to heap up wealth for me. Why not give up business and enjoy what you have made?"

"My dear Jack," the father answered with a smile, "business is my very life. I am so accustomed to it, and have been for so many years, that it has become second nature. I should be miserable if I had nothing to do."

"That's just what I am," said Jack, with a laugh.

"Not quite miserable, I hope," said the father, "and you will soon find plenty of things to occupy your time. The life of a country gentleman need not be an idle one."

"No, I suppose not," was the answer, "but somehow I don't seem to get into the swing of it. I fear my tastes don't lie in that direction."

"Might I ask in what direction your tastes do lie?" the father asked, with a quizzical smile.

"Now, then, my dear old dad, you've hit the nail on the head at last," Jack replied, as he rose slowly from the garden-chair on which he had been sitting, and gazed with a somewhat tired expression across the rich expanse of country that stretched out before him. "Fact is, I don't think I have any tastes, or ideas, or plans, or ambition—or anything, in fact. I'm just too lazy to do mischief; even the effort of doing nothing almost overpowers me."

"And yet you talk of going to business," said his father, with a laugh.

"Just by way of change," was the reply. "I've no doubt I should tire of it in a fortnight."

"In less time than that," his father replied. "The fact is, Jack, you were not intended for business; and, thank heaven, if all goes well, you will have an ample fortune, so that there will be no reason why you should worry yourself."

"If all goes well?" Jack questioned; "what do you mean by that?"

"Oh, nothing—nothing at all," was the quick reply.

"Of course nothing is absolutely certain in this life, and my business is largely speculative. But I am morally certain this time to make the biggest haul of my life."

"And if you fail?" said Jack.

"We will not talk of failure, if you please. I've never failed yet. I've made all my calculations with great care, and left a wide margin for contingencies."

"And the stake is what?"

"Jack, you are inquisitive," and Robert Formby gave a little laugh. "Moreover, I am not going to vex you with business details."

"But if I am interested, and would like to know?"

"Why then, I am sorry to disappoint you; but the subject is too big to be explained in a sentence."

- "Then make a speech."
- "Why, Jack, I never knew you so persistent before. I think I'd better reconsider my decision relative to your future."
 - "Yes, do, and take me into partnership."
- "How much capital will you bring into the concern?"

 Jack shrugged his shoulders, then answered, "All my fortune; now you know the sum."
- "Doubtful! But this much I will explain to you: I deal in futures. For instance, I have purchased largely next year's cotton crop, as far as our imports are concerned."
 - "Which crop," said Jack, "doesn't exist."
- "True. But I control our market, and so can command my own prices."
- "Suppose the manufacturers should combine and resist you?"
 - "Which they won't do."
 - "So you are quite safe?"
- "Quite. But there goes the dinner gong; now away and dress, and let business matters rest for the remainder of the day."

It seemed to Jack a stupid thing to dress for dinner, when only he and his father sat down to table. But Robert Formby was anxious to train his son in the way he should go; and as he fully intended him to be a country gentleman, he thought he could not begin too soon to practise his rôle.

Mrs. Formby had been dead several years, and there had never been a daughter. Jack had finished his University career, with no great credit to himself, only a few weeks ago, and was now expected to live at his ease, and enjoy life to his heart's content.

This idea, for good or evil, his father had taken great pains to instil into his mind. He had grown up from childhood with the belief that he was expected to do nothing, and that expectation he realized to its fullest extent. He was the very perfection of indolence and easy-going indifference. At college he was a general favourite, and yet the butt of all his companions. Every question with him resolved itself into the simple issue of which was the greater or less trouble. He was neither generous nor selfish, his companions said. If it would be more trouble to withhold than to bestow, he would appear as the soul of generosity, but if vice versâ, the opposite opinion would be formed.

"Why should he worry himself?" was his answer to every objection and to every complaint. "Suppose he were to work hard, and cram himself full of Greek and Latin, or lose himself in the mystic regions of pure mathematics, what good would come of it all? He was not going to earn his living as a teacher, or practise at the bar, or even enter the Church. He was going to be a gentleman, so his father had always told him, and for that reason he intended to take life easy, and let all work who would."

So with this easy-going philosophy he contented himself, or tried to do; for in truth he was never satisfied with himself, or with the world. Life was a bore, and existence a burden. There was a constant aching in his heart for something he could not define. As far as he knew, he had everything that heart could wish for, and yet he had a vague feeling that his life was without meaning or purpose. It is true he never speculated very deeply about the matter; that would be too much trouble,

and be had a perfect horror of taking trouble. Yet all the same he knew that he was a perfectly worthless and miserable individual, "neither fit for this world," as he once expressed it, "or any other world."

He had hailed the completion of his college course with delight, as he hailed every other change; but before a fortnight had passed he was as restless and as ill at ease as before. He tried to rate himself sometimes for his indolence and discontent, but the effort was always too great, and the reflection—"What's the use of bothering?" would be the end of the matter.

Yet his face was not destitute of what is generally termed "character." He had a broad, square forehead, a clear blue eye, a finely chiselled mouth, and a well rounded chin. His lips shut firmly, indicative of a decision of character that had never yet manifested itself, while in his clear, kindly eye there flashed sometimes a momentary fire that spoke of possibilities of passion and force that never yet had been touched.

Altogether Jack Formby, at twenty-three, was a puzzle to all his friends. Tall, handsome, and well knit, frank, free, and indolent; without a vice except laziness, and yet having no purpose in life, and without ambition.

His father was both pleased and disappointed with him. Pleased that he had cultivated no bad habits; disappointed that he had cultivated no good ones. He had no wish that he should manifest any interest in business, yet he was anxious to see him take an interest in life, and in the social and political questions of the day.

"He will develop yet," he had said to himself, each time Jack returned to college after the holidays. "The lad has fire and force in him, if they can only be got at.

He's a slumbering volcano in a small way. All he wants is stirring up; but how to stir him up is the problem."

But as the months and years sped on, and the latent fire—if any existed—showed no sign of kindling, and the same dull, almost stupid, indifference to everything remained as the most prominent trait in his character, Robert Formby resolved to put an end to his son's college days and take him in hand himself.

So far, however, his efforts had not amounted to much. Sometimes, as on the evening in question, he had taken a momentary interest in business, rather to the annoyance of his father than anything else, but all other matters he had voted a bore.

He had no love for society; no taste for hunting or shooting. He cared nothing for evening parties, balls, or dances, and manifested a decided aversion to the society of ladies.

"Jack," said his father, over the dinner table, "I really don't know what to make of you."

"No," said the young man, with a drawl, and a sly twinkle in his blue eyes; "I thought you were going to make a gentleman of me."

"Well, that has been my aim hitherto," was the reply; but you seem to take anything but kindly to the pursuits that most gentlemen indulge in."

"But you know, my affectionate pater, that I can't bear to be worried."

"And nobody wants to worry you," replied his father, a little bit impatiently; "but I should like to see you rouse yourself a bit, and take an interest in politics or social science, or the pleasures of the field, or in anything, in fact. You are a man now, you know."

"Aye," he answered, with imperturbable gravity, "I'm big enough, ain't I, and old enough, and fool enough? But really, my father, you have always told me to take things easy, and enjoy myself."

"But, on your own confession, you are not enjoying yourself."

"But that's not my fault," Jack answered, with a suppressed yawn. "I try to take things easily enough, in all conscience. I never vex myself, or get into a passion, if I can help it. The world is such a horridly stupid place, and is too big to be mended."

"There you make a mistake, Jack. The world is right enough. It is you that are stupid."

"Really, my father," said Jack, with a drawl, "you are scarcely complimentary."

"Very likely not," his father answered, "but I am speaking the truth nevertheless, and I am deeply in earnest. I am beginning to fear that I have made a mistake all along. One doesn't like to confess that he's been in the wrong, and I have never admitted it, even to myself, before. But facts should be faced, however unpleasant."

"But really, my father, you must excuse me, but I don't see what all this is leading to," Jack interposed.

"Well, in plain English I mean this. I fear in times past I have been trying to impress upon you what did not need impressing."

"And what might that be?" Jack asked.

"That you should take things easily, and never worry yourself about ways and means. If I had taught you self-reliance, and given you to understand that you would have to depend on your own energies in getting through

life, I am inclined to think it might have been better for both of us."

"Very likely," Jack answered, "but it's too much trouble to think out such a big problem as that, so suppose we change the subject."

"Jack, you are almost provoking," his father answered.

"Nay, my father, but I don't like to see you worrying yourself over what can't be helped."

"Jack, you are my only child," his father answered, seriously, "and I should like to see you take your proper position in society, but I will say no more on the subject at present. A word to the wise should be sufficient."

"To which class I fear I don't belong," Jack answered, with a laugh. "And now I'll take a few grapes, if you don't mind passing them."

And so the subject dropped, and between the two was never renewed again.

CHAPTER II.

A CHANCE MEETING.

EITHER Jack Formby nor his father soon fell asleep that night. Both kept pondering over the conversation that had passed between them, and both were dissatisfied with the result.

"If Jack would only break through that hard crust of indifference, I would not mind," was Mr. Formby's reflection. "I can't and I won't believe that the lad has no ability; all he needs is stirring up. The fire is smouldering, and needs the torch of some great passion, some strong love, or some lofty ambition to kindle it into a glowing flame. But then, alas! he seems utterly passionless, and destitute of all ambition."

To this conclusion Mr. Formby's reflections always tended, and had he been able to read his son's thoughts at that moment, he would only have been strengthened in the conclusion to which he had come.

"So the dad thinks I'm stupid," Jack said to himself again and again, as he rolled himself from side to side, and courted sleep in vain. "Well, I suppose I am,

though it ain't pleasant to be told so for all that. But then what's a fellow to do? I'm not fit for business, and what people call pleasure is to me a bore; and to worry one's life out for the sake of enjoyment is very poor philosophy, according to my notion. Really, I don't see why the governor should grumble. He always said I was to do nothing, and I keep working at it like a nigger." And Jack laughed softly to himself; but there was no joy in his laughter, and a moment later his brow was furrowed again with painful thoughts.

When Jack got down to breakfast he found that his father had preceded him by at least two hours, so that he was obliged to take his meal alone. He did not object to that particularly; it saved him the bother of talking to anybody; moreover, he could take his own time over the repast, for he hated to be worried.

On his plate he found a brief note from his father. It ran as follows:—

"Dear Jack,—Will you run across to Netherby's some time during the day and have a look at that mare he has for sale? I have had some thoughts of buying her, but would like your opinion first, as I know you are a fair judge of horse-flesh.

"Your affectionate father, R. F."

"Oh, bother the——!" was Jack's first exclamation; but he suddenly checked himself, and proceeded to attack his breakfast with more than usual vigour.

He paused at length, and took a second look at the note. "Really," he said to himself, "I ought to oblige the pater if it is in my power. I shall be getting selfish as well as idle if I go on at this rate."

The day was beautifully fine; and when Jack got out into the sunshine he felt his spirits instantly revive. All

the long stretch of valley below him lay steeped in a golden haze, the farther uplands, dotted with fair mansions and extensive plantations, seemed to bask in the amber light, while beyond the plantations and the meadow-land stretched the purple moors, which looked dark and almost desolate under the pale blue sky.

The time was harvest, though no sound of reapers broke the stillness, for this was not a corn-growing district. Farmers found it pay better to keep what they call the "green side up;" for the great city of Bodelford was not twenty miles away, and milk and butter found a ready sale, and commanded an excellent price.

The river Bodel, broad, and for the most part shallow, meandered pleasantly through the valley below, and made dreamy music in the stilly eventide, and filled the silence of the night with its low-toned song.

Jack stood for some minutes in front of his home admiring the scene.

"A fellow ought to be happy here," he said at length. "Ryecroft is beautiful for situation, and full of every comfort and luxury. And what can be more bewitching than this scene? How the Bodel flashes where its ripples catch the light! How green the meadows that fringe its pebbly shore! How cool the plantations look on the farther hillside—how peaceful the homesteads among the trees! What is it I wonder that makes me restless, discontented, and ill at ease?"

He did not wait to answer the question, but started off at a swinging pace along the winding carriage drive. With a cheery "Good morning" to Blake, the gardener, he passed out through the lodge gates into the turn-pike road. For a quarter of a mile he went carelessly on at the same swinging pace, then leaped lightly over a style, remarking as he did so, "I'll take the river path, it may be a bit longer, but it is infinitely more pleasant, and the shade of the trees will be grateful in this bright sunshine."

For half a mile he sauntered along the river's bank, in a very leisurely manner, keeping his eyes fixed for the most part upon the shining water, then suddenly paused at the stepping-stones, while an expression partly of astonishment, partly of amusement, swept over his face. In the middle of the river, where the water was deepest and was rushing with the swiftness of an arrow, stood a young lady on one of the stepping-stones, evidently afraid of moving either backward or forward. Her left hand she pressed tightly over her eyes, while her right hand was stretched out as though to balance herself.

Jack took in the situation in a moment. The swiftly rushing water had turned her giddy, and now with eyes closed she was trying to recover herself. Once she took her hand from her eyes and made as though she would leap to the next stone, but instantly thought better of it and steadied herself once more in her old position.

"The longer she stays the giddier she will be," was Jack's reflection, "so I suppose I will have to help her across."

He did not seem however, to at all relish the situation. His dislike of "girls" and his great objection to taking trouble, made the task anything but an agreeable one. To make matters worse, he saw that the young lady was a stranger, and he was always shy of people he had not previously met.

"I wish I had gone the other——" he muttered to himself, but did not finish the sentence. Perhaps he thought better of it, for he darted forward instantly, and stepping lightly from stone to stone, was soon by the stranger's side.

"The rushing water has made you giddy, I think," he said in his gentlest tones. "Will you allow me to help you across?"

"You are very kind," she answered, taking her hand from her eyes and placing it in his, "I shall be so much obliged if you will."

But for a moment Jack seemed both drunk and motionless. Such a face he had never seen before—so fair, so sweet, so gentle—while her voice sounded almost like music in his ears.

She was dressed in black. He had not noticed that until now, but this, coupled with her timidity, accounted for the extreme paleness of her face.

"You are a little frightened," he said, at length, holding her hand tightly in his, "but trust yourself to me and step out boldly; the next is rather a wide gap and the current is swift, but you can easily do it—there!—now the next."

And so from stone to stone they tripped lightly till safe on the river's bank.

He let go her hand then, and waited a moment for her to speak. "What a lissom, dainty, graceful little creature she is," was the thought that passed through his mind; then the clear brown eyes looked him full in the face, while the red lips parted, showing two rows of pearly-white teeth.

"I thank you very much," were the words that fell

upon his ears and in some unaccountable manner set his heart throbbing wildly; "it was very foolish of me to lose my head in that way, but I am not used to crossing rivers by fording-stones. I shall not give in, however. I don't like to be beaten, do you? and I shall return this way again."

"Well, I don't know about that," Jack answered, dubiously, for this little speech had nearly taken his breath away, and the question was so abrupt and searching.

"Don't know about what?" she asked, a little bit shyly.

"About being beaten," he answered, slowly. "I'm afraid I would rather be beaten than take much trouble over a thing."

"Oh, no, surely you don't mean that; you are only joking," she said, with a little laugh, while the colour mounted to her pale cheeks.

"But you don't know me," he said, in tones that sounded half regretful.

"No, but you are very kind, and I am very thankful to you," and with a graceful inclination of the head, she moved quickly along the river-path.

Jack stood watching her until she was nearly out of sight.

"By Jove," he muttered, "if she ain't the loveliest creature I ever saw in my life. I wonder who she is, and where she came from, and where she lives? I'm glad I came this way after all. I wouldn't have missed this little adventure for a fortune."

And with this reflection he turned on his heel, and went bounding across the river, and then boldly faced the hill on the opposite side. Twenty minutes' brisk walking

brought him to the gates of Netherby Hall, and five minutes later he was discussing, with more than usual animation, the points of the bay mare with Dick Netherby and the Squire.

"Now, Formby," said young Netherby, when Jack had examined the mare to his satisfaction, "You will stay and have lunch with us, as a matter of course; we see so little of you, that when you do put in an appearance we are not disposed to let you go in a hurry."

"Thanks," said Jack, with a drawl, "it is very kind of you, I am sure. But you must excuse me to-day, you must really; to tell you the truth I've only just had breakfast."

"And what of that," said Dick, "we sha'n't lunch for another hour, and in the meanwhile we can have a canter—say to Whetstone and back."

"Really, I should enjoy it very much," said Jack, pulling a wry face at the fib, "but I cannot possibly stay today. I really cannot."

"You must be an amazingly busy fellow," said Netherby, with a laugh. "However, if you can't stay, I won't press you further. But will you promise for Saturday afternoon? We are having a small tennis party, and I was just about to send you an invite when you called."

"Well, thanks," said Jack, with a drawl, "I'll promise to come, though I can't promise to play. You know I'm an awful duffer at those things."

"You should practise oftener," said Netherby. "Now your cousin, or whatever he is—Ralph Formby—is quite a crack player."

"Is he coming on Saturday?" Jack asked.

"Oh, yes; our Kate thinks he is indispensable; and

really he is a downright good fellow—don't you think so? The governor thinks a world of him."

"He's splendid company," Jack remarked, sententiously.

"Splendid," echoed Dick; "though, by-the-bye, Formby, what is the relationship between you?"

"Our grandfathers were brothers," said Jack; "so I suppose we shall be what is called second cousins."

"Oh, just so! precisely!" Dick answered; "I always lose myself when I get beyond first cousins. But to come back to the tennis; you will be here on Saturday, without fail?"

"You may depend on me," Jack answered; and with a hasty "Good-morning" he was gone. He felt a little ashamed of himself as he hurried along the dusty highway. He might have stayed to lunch, and ought to have done so; moreover, he would have done so but for the chance meeting of the morning. He hardly liked to confess it to himself; but the truth must be told—he was all impatience to see the sweet face and the dainty graceful figure that bad so captivated his imagination an hour ago.

She had told him that she would return by the same way, for she did not believe in being beaten, and he might have the pleasure of seeing her cross, or, better still, of lending her a helping hand.

In this, however, he was doomed to disappointment. In turning a corner, five hundred yards before he reached the river, he met her face to face. She had crossed without his help; and now, with flushed cheeks and parted lips, was hurrying quickly up the hill-side.

She smiled at him as she passed which he acknow-

ledged by raising his hat; and when he turned to look after her, she had turned the corner and was out of sight.

Slowly, and with listless steps he pursued the rest of his journey home, and during the greater part of the afternoon he sat out under the verandah in front of the house, musing over the events of the morning. He was sorely puzzled at himself; he had always so cordially disliked the gentler sex, that he was quite unable to account for his present interest in this strange young lady. Perhaps it was because she was a stranger that he felt so interested. And yet why should that influence him? Strangers were coming and going, and fresh faces were to be seen any day in the neighbourhood, and never before had he cared who came or who went away.

"I'm a great simpleton," he said to himself at length, "to worry myself over a girl's face. I'll get a book and think no more about it."

And, suiting the action to the word, he rose from his seat and sauntered off into the library, and half-an-hour later the butler found him fast asleep in a rocking-chair.

CHAPTER IIL

THE TENNIS PARTY.

URING the next two days Jack took more walking exercise than he had done during the previous two months. Each morning he was downstairs in sufficient time to take breakfast with his father, much to that gentleman's satisfaction, who began to flatter himself that the conversation he had had with his son was already beginning to bear fruit. He gave no hint of this, however, nor did he make any remark on Jack's early rising, or manifest the least surprise when Jack proposed to accompany him to the station.

The weather continued delightfully fine, with just sufficient breeze to keep the air sweet and cool; while the country looked its best, especially in the sweet dewy morning, when the hedgerows hung with little globes of light, and the trees and fields seemed swept with a richer green.

The walk to the station and back did Jack good in every way. He felt brighter, happier and healthier for the exercise, and as a consequence, was disposed to take a more cheerful view of life and the world generally.

He did not return to the house by the way he had come. He felt in no hurry to get back to Ryecroft. A little longer walk, he argued, would do him good, and the path along the river's bank was always a pleasant one; but especially so on a summer's morning.

It was surprising how interesting this walk had suddenly become, for he returned to it again after lunch, and spent a good part of the afternoon within view of the stepping-stones; and when he turned his steps homewards, it was with a slow and measured tread, as though he felt loth to leave a spot so fair.

He did not like admitting, even to himself, that it was the hope of meeting the chance acquaintance of the previous day that lured him thither. Put into plain English, it seemed such unheard-of folly, that he did not like to own to himself that he was capable of it. Yet on the following morning he returned from the station by the same route, and even extended his rambles across the stepping-stones, and for many a mile along the country-side, and returned to a late lunch tired, hungry, and disappointed.

"I'm pretty much of a noodle," he said to himself an hour or so later, as he sat under the verandah puffing leisurely at a choice cigar, and with his eyes fixed on the valley below. It was a warm, quiet afternoon, with scarcely a sound to break the stillness of the countryside, while a thin haze hung over the valley from end to end, and crept softly up the hill sides, and vanished on the fringe of the purple moors.

"Anyhow, I wish I knew who she was," he went on, taking the cigar from his mouth, and knocking the ashes off with his second finger. "It's tantalising to be foiled in this way, to say the least of it."

He knew that he could easily find out "who she was," if he could only summon sufficient courage to make enquiries amongst the neighbours, but that he could not bring himself to do. What business was it of his? Moreover; he knew he would get chaffed unmercifully were he even to attempt it. So he watched and waited, hoping that some good fairy would come to his rescue sooner or later and satisfy his curiosity.

But when Saturday afternoon came, and his hope seemed as far as ever from being realized, he grew sullen and cross, and was on the point of sending a note to Dick Netherby, excusing himself from attending the tennis party, and would have done so but for the interposition of his father, who always returned from business at noon on Saturday, and who would not hear of him excusing himself.

"It's all nonsense," he said, in answer to some petulant remark of his son's. "You don't get amongst your friends half enough. Come, don your flannels, and I will walk across with you, and complete the purchase of the mare."

"I'd much rather stay at home," said Jack, with a frown.

"Very likely you would," said his father; "but we must not always follow our likes. We have duties to others as well as to ourselves."

"But I'm such a duffer at tennis," Jack interposed.

"All the more reason you should practise it," was the answer.

He was on the point of saying, "I don't want to be bothered," but thought better of it, and, without another word, went to his room to get ready.

At the gate of Netherby Hall father and son separated,

the one going to the stables, the other to the tennis-lawn. Jack felt ashamed to put in an appearance, for he was nearly an hour behind time, and was very much afraid his absence had inconvenienced the other players.

On coming upon the scene, however, he was both pleased and piqued to discover that he was not at all missed; for two sets had been made up, and the game was in full swing. Crossing to a garden chair, he took a seat with as little ado as possible, and began in his own deliberate manner to take stock of the guests. Slowly his gaze travelled from one fair face to another; then, with a sudden start, he half rose from his chair, while the hot blood rushed suddenly to his neck and face.

"By Jove, it's her!" he said, half aloud; "and more beautiful than ever. Now I shall know who she is and where she comes from."

She had not noticed him yet, she was too interested in the game. Would she recognise him, he wondered, when she did see him? He should feel awfully disappointed if she did not.

From the moment he caught sight of his unknown acquaintance he had no eyes for any other member of the party. He became interested in the game, too. How well she played? How easily she caught up the balls, and sent them spinning over the net! How graceful was her every movement! How fresh the colour on her cheeks! He hoped she would be on the winning side.

The game was a closely-contested one, and all the players were getting excited. Jack fairly held his breath, so anxious was he that the fair stranger should win. "Well planted!" he shouted, in his excitement; but no one heeded him. "'Vantage home!" cried Dick Netherby,

a moment later. Then a long minute of intense excitement, and up went the stranger's racket; while Dick shouted "Game!"

"Five games all. This is close work," said Ralph Formby, from the other side of the net. "Now for the final tug of war."

"It's your serve, Kate," called Dick, who was playing against his sister. Then, turning to the stranger, he said, "Now, Ada, do your best; this game completes the set."

She answered him only with a smile, which Jack felt he would give a fortune for, then stepped quickly back, caught up the ball that Kate had served, and sent it spinning over the net; back it came again into her court, and was as quickly returned, but this time with such a "twist" on that it fell like a lump of dough, and gave her opponent no chance of returning it.

"Well done, our side," shouted Dick; then in a lower tone he added, "Ada, you are doing splendidly." A pleased smile overspread her face, but she did not answer, and the next moment the play was in his hands. He did not do so well, however, and "fifteen all" was called. The next ball was served to Ada and "missed," at which Ralph Formby bawled out, exultingly, "thirty-fifteen," while Jack felt that he would very much like to punch his cousin's head, and actually clenched his fists when he shouted out a minute later "forty-fifteen."

"I'm afraid she'll lose," muttered Jack to himself. "I shall be sorry if she does. She deserves to win, she plays so well."

But now the tide of fortune has turned again, and "forty-thirty" and "deuce" are called in quick succession.

"By Jove, there's a chance for her yet," mutters Jack with clenched teeth; "Now for it, fair stranger." But the tide goes against her once more. While Ralph Formby calls out "'Vantage home."

This is responded to a moment later by Dick Netherby calling "'Vantage all"; and each member of the party draws a long breath.

"The last service is to you, Ada, do your best," whispers Dick.

"I'll try," she answers with a smile; and the next moment she cleverly returns the ball. In a moment it is spinning towards her again, but she is quite prepared for it, and drops it nicely, just over the net. Ralph Formby is there, however, to pick it up, and back it comes a third time, to be returned by Dick Netherby. "Well done," cries Jack in his excitement. But Kate is in her place to return it. "Quick, Ada," calls Dick in his excitement; the next moment he flings his straw hat into the air. Ada's last stroke had won the game.

Jack felt triumphant, though why he should do so he hardly knew. He had never been an enthusiast at tennis, or, indeed, at any other game, and why he should get excited in the present instance was a puzzle, even to himself. But he had no time to reason about the matter even if he had the inclination, for Dick Netherby was rating him for being "late, as usual"; while the others were standing near waiting to speak.

He could never remember afterwards whether he spoke to his cousin and Miss Netherby or not, but he always carried with him a distinct recollection of being introduced to Miss Ada Woodville.

She came forward with a frank smile lighting up her

lovely face. "We have met before, Mr. Formby, I think," she said.

And he answered "Once before, Miss Woodville"; and then somehow it seemed as if they had known each other for years, and in a few minutes they were engaged in quite an animated conversation.

Then other guests who had been strolling through the grounds came up, and new sides were demanded for a fresh game of tennis. To his infinite delight Jack found that he had secured Miss Woodville as his partner, and that they were to play against Netherby and a Miss Cox, of Bodelford, a young lady of uncertain age.

"I hope you can play a losing game, Miss Woodville," Jack said to his companion, as they were taking up their positions.

"Why! Mr. Formby?" she asked.

"Because I am always on the losing side," he answered, with a laugh.

"How unfortunate," she said, smiling back at him, "but you should be more careful in the choice of a partner."

"It isn't that my partners play badly," said Jack,
"Indeed, I am generally allow'd to select a good player
to make up for my own deficiency, for, really Miss
Woodville, I'm a wretchedly poor player."

"I'm sorry to hear that," she said, "for in truth I don't like to be beaten."

"So I have heard you say before," he answered with a smile.

"Heard me say so before?" she said, looking at him incredulously.

"Yes!" he answered, "don't you remember?"

- "No," she said, looking puzzled, "I do not. When was it, or under what circumstances?"
- "You remember our first meeting," he said, "three days ago?"
- "Oh, very well," she answered, with a smile and a blush,
- "And don't you remember, when you got to the farther side of the river, you said you would return by the same way; as you did not like to be beaten."
 - "Did I say that?" she answered naïvely.
- "You did," said Jack, sententiously, "and it appears you succeeded also."
- "Oh, yes!" she answered, "I saw you coming before I reached the fording stones and so I made a rush for it, and never paused a moment till I was safe over."
 - "But you might have fallen in," said Jack.
- "In which case you would have had the trouble of fishing me out," she answered defiantly.
- "I should have enjoyed that immensely," said Jack, with a good humoured laugh.
- "For shame!" she said, "I did not think you were capable of such an unkind remark," and with a pretended frown, she rushed off to the corner of the court, for it was her first serve, and their opponents were getting impatient to begin the game.

It need scarcely be said that Jack was on the losing side as usual, though he played better than he was ever known to before, while he threw an amount of enthusiasm into the game that was altogether unusual with him.

For almost the first time in his life, playing was not a bore, while the afternoon instead of being slow, passed all too quickly. Regretfully he watched the shadows deepening over the hills, and reluctantly he left the lawn, when it became too dark to play, to go indoors. The invitation to stay to dinner he accepted with alacrity, and a servant was promptly dispatched to Ryecroft for his dress suit. The Netherbys, as well as his father, wondered at his unusual gaiety, though none of them had the slightest suspicion of the cause, nor did they appear to notice the change.

As for Jack, he was simply conscious of an unusual flow of spirits, and a cheerfulness and lightheartedness that of late, to say the least, had not been usual with him. What its meaning might be he did not take the trouble to interpret. That the presence of Ada Woodville was in some way associated with the change he did not deny, but he had no wish to probe the question to any depth. For once he was happy; he had somehow got out of the gloom into the sunshine, and he was disposed to make the most of it without asking any questions.

He had a vague feeling that if he began to inquire into the matter it might spoil the pleasure. It might be like a child opening its drum to see where the sound came from, and he was determined not to do anything so foolish. He would just sit still and enjoy the music, and the beauty, and the sunshine while they lasted, and if they came to an end, which he supposed they would sometime, he would be just where he was before—no worse, surely—perhaps a little better. The memory of such a time would be always sweet, and so he resolved that he would make the most of his opportunity.

CHAPTER IV.

SOMETHING TO LIVE FOR.

T last Jack Formby had found something in life to interest him, and to render existence less a bore. The dawn of a great strong love was beginning to touch his drowsy, indifferent nature, and to thrill it into life and animation. For many days and weeks he was a sore puzzle to himself. He was conscious in his own hazy way that a change had come over his spirits and over his life. The flowers, always beautiful in his eyes, had somehow grown more beautiful, and the song of the birds had a sweeter cadence than ever he had known before. The green of the wind-swept hills had changed to a richer hue, and the purple moors were more glorious than he had ever seen them in the days gone by. Even the Bodel rippled over its stony bed with a more joyous song, while the lowing of cattle in the distant fields seemed to have possibilities of music and melody in it.

He discovered, too, "that girls were not at all bad when one got to know them," and that a game of tennis, to say the least of it, was splendid exercise. Garden parties he pronounced to be "rare fun," and never declined an invitation to one if he could possibly help it.

Yet for many weeks he never questioned himself as to the secret of this change; while the thought of being in love scarcely occurred to him. He had never been of the sentimental sort, had never been given to reading novels, while the idea of marriage had scarcely entered his head.

During those weeks he met Ada Woodville continually, and thought her more beautiful every time he saw her. She was like a beautiful picture or a beautiful piece of statuary (so he said to himself), that he was never tired of looking at, and whose beauty grew upon him the more he looked at it. Yet he never thought of being in love with her, any more than of being in love with a picture. It is true she possessed many charms that a picture could never possess. To begin with, she could talk to him, and when she did so, her voice in his ears was sweeter than any music that he had ever heard, and thrilled his heart in a way that he could not understand, while the expression of her face was constantly changing, and her eyes revealed depths of tenderness and sympathy that no canvas could shadow forth.

Could all this mean love? In truth, he never thought of asking himself the question. He enjoyed the days as they came and went, revelled in the mild intoxication of her presence, yet never asked its meaning or questioned to what it tended.

Meeting her one morning in the little village of Essebrig, that stands at the confluence of the Esse and Bodel, he suddenly discovered that he was going in her direction, and so they walked away together, and soon found themselves out in the country, with their faces toward the moors. How her presence thrilled him as she walked by his side? How deliciously sweet was the morning air! How gladsome and joyous the singing of the birds! Jack felt as if he did not want to talk. He would just like to walk quietly on for ever, with Ada Woodville at his side, and revel in the quiet and in the beauty.

At first they talked about the weather and the latest garden party, and then silence fell between them; and they walked on slowly for half a mile, as though each were unconscious of the other's presence.

Pausing, at length, and lifting her eyes upwards towards the moors, Ada said, as if speaking to herself, "Your country is very beautiful, where the smoke has not spoiled it; but it is not equal to our sunny south."

"I was not aware you were a Southerner," Jack said, looking at her steadily.

"Oh, yes, I am," she said, with a little laugh, "unless you would call me a 'Westerner.' The truth is, I am what your Lancashire operatives call a 'Cornwaller.'"

"Indeed," he said, in a tone of surprise.

But she went on without heeding him. "I dare say I am prejudiced in favour of my native county, but it seems to me the most beautiful of all the places I have seen. And then so many happy memories gather about the old home, where I was born, and where I lived all my life till I came here. Alas! it is my home no longer!"

"Your home no longer?" said Jack, inquiringly. And then he regretted that he had spoken, for he saw that her eyes were full of tears, and her lips trembling with emotion.

"My Uncle Netherby wanted me to leave it last

Christmas, when my mother died," she went on at length. "But I could not tear myself away, especially as dear old nurse would be without a home. But when nurse died, a month ago, I felt that every tie was broken, and that I could not stay there any longer."

"And is your father dead also?" Jack asked, at length.

"Oh, yes!" was the quick reply. "He died five years ago. If he were living, all would be well."

"Perhaps all is well as it is," Jack ventured to remark.

"Yes, I try to think so," she replied; "though it is very hard to realize sometimes that all things are working together for good."

"Yes, I suppose it is," he said, slowly, as if debating the question with himself.

"When my mother died," she went on, "I felt as if all the world were dark, that life had nothing more to offer, and I prayed that I might die too."

"You should not talk of dying," he said, "you are too young and too—," he had nearly added beautiful but checked himself in time.

"God has helped me to bear my grief," she said, "and I am very happy here. Uncle and Aunt Netherby are as kind as they can be, and Dick and Kate are just as good as if they were my brother and sister."

"Oh, yes, you could not have fallen into better hands," he remarked, after a pause.

"No, I am sure I could not," she answered quietly, and with emphasis, "and then besides that, I am getting to know such a number of nice people."

"Yes, there is very good society in this neighbourhood," he answered, "and you are sure to make friends."

"Do you think so?" she asked, with a smile.

"I am certain of it!" he said, emphatically. "I only wish I had a sister or a mother that you could visit at our house."

"I wish you had," she said, ingenuously; "I am sure it must be very lonely for you. Why don't you go to business with your father?"

"He doesn't want me," Jack answered, lugubriously; besides, I have no talent in that direction."

"Indeed," she said, "and what do you intend to be?"

"Oh, nothing, I suppose," he answered, beginning to feel very uncomfortable. "My father is anxious that I should take life easy and enjoy myself."

"And do nothing for the good or the enjoyment of others?" she asked.

"That question has not been considered, I fear," he said, with growing uneasiness.

"But you surely will not live for yourself only," she said, looking at him seriously; "that is not like you I am sure, you will find some great purpose in life yet, and we shall hear of your achievements."

He blushed uncomfortably under her steady gaze, and heartily wished that he could turn the conversation into some other channel. But there seemed no help for it, so he blurted out in his dogged way.

"The only purpose in life for me it seems, is to squeeze all the juice I can out of the orange."

"Oh, no," she said, "I am sure that is not like you, for you are not a bit selfish."

"You do not know me," he said, "for I am not only selfish, but I am idle and altogether lacking in enterprise. In truth, I have no purpose in life, and very little ambition Unfortunately, I was born with a silver spoon

in my mouth and it has kept there ever since. I wish I were other than I am, that's a fact, for I don't want to add hypocrisy to my other vices."

"Oh, Mr. Formby," she said, with a laugh, "what a long and cruel speech. You surely would not have me think so ill of you as all that?"

"I would have you think of me as well as you honestly can," he said, seriously; "but I am afraid none of my friends can think very well of me."

"You should take a lesson from your relative, Mr. Ralph," she said, banteringly. "How full of energy and enthusiasm he is! How anxious to do good and serve his generation! I do think him a splendid type of an Englishman."

To this Jack made no reply. He did not like to tell his companion that she was utterly unable to read character, and was unused to the ways of worldly and designing men. Moreover, Ralph Formby was a distant relative of his, and he shrank from saying a word that might be considered to reflect upon his character; and yet he felt that this guileless child of nature, coming from her far away country home, should be put upon her guard, and screened from the perils that would beset her in this new sphere of life.

He knew that he was not the proper person to do this, though he would gladly give his life to protect her. He was not her guardian, but he might be her friend, and more than that he *would* be. He would not needlessly obtrude himself, but he could watch over her, notwithstanding, and she need never know anything about it.

A few minutes ago he said he had no purpose in life, but now he had suddenly discovered one. Ralph Formby meant no good in trying to ingratiate himself into the favour of this pure maiden, and yet the Netherbys would encourage him, he was sure, for he had so wormed his way into their good graces, that they regarded him as a paragon of excellence.

What should he do, then, in the matter? Should he remain silent, or should he put her on her guard?

"In truth I must be silent," he said to himself. "I know nothing positive against Ralph; he may be all he professes to be. I have no great love for him it is true, and no great faith in him; but that proves nothing. I have a feeling that he is not a good man—that behind all his fine ways he hides—well, to put it mildly—an ungenerous heart. But then I may be wrong in my surmises. No, I must remain silent; but I must watch, nevertheless."

He had just come to this conclusion when Ada interrupted his reflections by saying,

"You do not much care for your cousin, I think, Mr. Formby."

"What makes you think that?" he said, with a start and a blush.

"Well, I hardly know," she answered, in some slight confusion; "but I thought so the first time you came to play tennis; and now, when I praise him, you do not speak."

"Ralph is but a distant relative of ours," he said, "and we have never been on very intimate terms; hence I do not know what his virtues are, and so cannot speak positively on the matter."

"Oh, that is mere evasion," she said, laughingly, "and I shall do my best to get you to be the very best of friends, and to love each other as cousins should."

"It is very kind of you, I am sure," he answered; "but you must not make the mistake of supposing that we are not friends. I can assure you no word of strife has ever passed between us."

"Oh, I didn't suppose that," she said, with another laugh; "but suppose we change the subject. Here we are on the fringe of the moors. I have often wanted to come as far as this."

"The view from here is very fine—don't you think so?" he asked, feeling relieved at the turn in the conversation.

"Yes," she said hesitatingly; "But I miss the sea. I have a feeling that it ought to be yonder, just as we see it shining across the downs at home."

"But you will soon get to love the heather," he said.
"I think those rolling billows of purple and brown are very fine, and listen to the dreamy music the wind is making, and see how the sunshine glints on the pools here and there. I hardly think your Cornwall can beat this."

"You have not seen Cornwall, I think," she said.

"Well, no, I've not," he answered, "the truth is, it is such an out of the way place, that the trouble of getting there has always struck me as being too big a price to pay for anything it may have to offer in the shape of scenery."

"You will not say so after you have been there," she replied, "though please do not think I do not admire this, for I think it is just delicious."

"I'm glad you think so," he answered, "for it wouldn't do to have you always fretting about the county you have left, and longing to get back again."

"Oh, but I have not left it altogether," she said with a smile. "I expect to spend at least three months every

year amongst my Cornish friends and kindred. I should pine myself to death if I thought I should go back no more. But come, it is time we turned our faces in the other direction, or I shall be too late for lunch, and you too, I expect."

"I lunch at any time, when it is most convenient," he answered, "but I am at your service, Miss Woodville."

The walk back was accomplished in much less time, for the way was down hill most of the distance.

- "You must be tired," he said, just before they reached the gate of Netherby Hall. "I am afraid I have been inconsiderate."
- "Oh, no, I am not in the least tired," she answered brightly. "I could easily walk as far again. Uncle is always pressing me to take more horse exercise, but I prefer walking to riding."
- "We might take a canter to Whetstone Edge some morning if you could prevail on your cousins to come with us."
 - "Is it too far to walk?" she asked.
- "Oh, yes, very much too far. "But I will speak to your cousin about it."
- "Thank you," she said. "But here we are at the gate," and she placed her little hand in his with a smile and a soft "good-morning."

The rest of the way home Jack accomplished like one in a dream, and when after lunch he sat smoking his cigar under the verandah, he was more than half disposed to believe that he had dreamed it all.

CHAPTER V.

LOST ON THE MOORS.

were but the prelude to many similar rambles, so that by the time Ada Woodville had been three months at Netherby Hall, she knew all the country side almost as well as the natives. She got to be passionately fond of the moors, and often took long rambles alone, much to the discomfort of her Cousin Kate, who considered it a very improper thing to do. But Ada could not see where the impropriety came in, if she had been allowed by her mother to ramble alone over the Cornish Downs. She did not see why she might not be allowed to rove across the Lancashire moors, and told her cousin so.

"But my dear Ada," said stately Miss Netherby.
"You never know who you may meet, and besides the moors are lonely and dangerous in places."

"Oh, I know where the dangerous places are," Ada responded readily, "and as for the loneliness I just revel in it. The wind whisking and soughing across the heather makes music just like the sea sometimes, and I just sit

still and listen, and dream of home. Oh, you can't tell how much I enjoy it, I think I should like to live on the moors. And then I know all the keepers now, so that I am never likely to meet anyone I don't know in a place that is so strictly preserved."

"You are a strange child, Ada," responded Kate, in a patronising tone, "I wish you would get a little more into society ways."

"Oh, but I don't care, you know, for what you call society, I'm just a simple country maiden, and nothing more, and in truth, I don't want to be."

"But you should want to be, Ada," said Kate, severely. "You know how you rave against men having no lofty ideal, and being fired by no great ambition and all that kind of thing. Why don't you have a lofty ideal yourself?"

"I have, Cousin Kate," Ada answered, with downcast eyes and a tremor in her voice. "But it is not to be what you would have me be. But please let us change the subject, and don't get angry with me for loving the hills and moors."

"Angry, child. No, I am not angry with you," said Kate, kissing her forehead. "But I want my little cousin to be careful, and not needlessly rush into danger."

"I will not do that," said Ada, brightly, and there the conversation ended.

But the rambles continued as before, for the autumn time revealed fresh beauties on moor and hill, and tempted Ada forth at all hours of the day, and filled her-with the most exquisite pleasure.

Jack Formby was always on the look out for the dainty figure that he could recognise a mile away, and so he

dropped upon her at the most unexpected times, and suddenly crossed her path when she had no suspicion he was near.

Yet to her, their meeting seemed the most natural thing in the world. He was as fond of the moors and hills as she was, and it would be strange indeed if rambling about so much they did not cross each other's path now and then. In her innocence and simplicity she had no suspicion that this handsome young fellow was constantly on the look out for her, and took his rambles not so much for love of nature as for love of her. When she saw him striding along the hill side, she would say to herself, "There is Mr. Formby out for one of his 'constitutionals' again. I wonder if he will come this way. How fond he is of nature."

And if Jack should happen to turn in another direction, as was sometimes the case, she was conscious of a pang of disappointment, and the ramble would lose a good deal of its pleasure and charm. But the wily fellow generally recognised her, though be might make no sign to that effect, and an hour later or less, would suddenly and unexpectedly drop across her path, and then lift his eyes as though surprised at meeting her.

At such times she always welcomed him with a smile, and sometimes told him that she was glad to meet him; and he would treasure up her words in his heart, and ponder them over in the quiet of the afternoon when sitting alone at home.

So the days slipped quickly and pleasantly away, while Ada and Jack began to feel as though they had known each other all their lives. He told her all about himself all about his school and college days, and how he always failed in his exam.'s, and how he never had, and feared he never would have, any heart or soul for work.

And she would chide him as a sister might, and read nim pretty lectures on what she thought young men ought to do. She had a very high and beautiful ideal of life and duty, and tried to inspire her companion with the thoughts that had burned their way into her own heart and brain.

He would listen very patiently, and with evident interest, for he loved to hear her talk, and on the whole she talked well and to the point; but he rarely gave her to feel that her talk had done him good.

"If I had your head, and heart, and enthusiasm," he would sometimes say, "I might do something. But really, Miss Woodville, there is nothing for a fellow in my position to do, and you know it is too much trouble to go hunting up work when there is no absolute necessity for it."

And she would sigh and look pained, and sometimes drop the conversation altogether. At other times he would lead her on to talk of herself and her early home, and then she would be at her best. So graphic were her word-pictures sometimes that Jack, though not of the imaginate sort, could see "Trevena House," with the little village from which it took its name lying below it in the pleasant green valley, and the quaint square tower of the old church, almost hidden among the trees. Could see the shimmer of the distant sea, where the valley broadened out, and the wooded hills rising right and left, and beyond these again he could see the breezy downs, where the golden gorse bloomed through all the summer days and the bracken lay like heaps of gold in the

autumn time, and onward still the bold and rocky promontories that pushed themselves far out into the sea, and even the white sail in the offing of some coaster or fishing smack tacking before the breeze.

"You fairly make me long to see this wonderful county of yours," he would sometimes say, after she had been describing some favourite scene. "I think I shall take a rambling tour in that direction if I live to see another summer." And she would answer quickly, "I wish you would;" and then more slowly, "But it might not seem all to you that it does to me. It is my home, you know."

Towards the end of October the weather took a sudden change, and the brilliantly fine weather that had obtained for many weeks gave place to rain and drizzle and fog. All the glory of the woods and hills vanished as if by magic, and out-door exercise became almost an impossibility. This continued till the middle of November, when the skies began to brighten a little again, and the short, dull days had occasioned gleams of pale, watery sunshine. But the weather, at best, was very treacherous, and though the morning might be as bright as a November morning can be, there was no certainty that it would not give place to a regular downpour before noon.

Ada sat in her room and watched the lowering skies with feelings of dismay—almost of despair. She never imagined that being confined to the house would become so irksome; and as the days passed on she fairly pined for the breezy upland, and the fresh, bracing air of the moors. She missed, too, the cheerful presence of Jack Formby. Debate the question with herself as she might, that was a fact she could not deny; so at last she

gave in. "Of course, I miss him," she said to herself; "I should be a strange creature if I did not. He has been very kind to me, and never obtrusive; and, though he is by no means my ideal, and he ought to be ashamed of his indolent ways, yet he has some very good qualities, and I like him, as a friend, very much."

This conclusion seemed to her eminently satisfactory, and a sufficient reason why she should continue to think about him and wish for his presence.

Jack would have found the weather more irksome than Ada, but for the fact that his father, having some business in London that would take him a week or two to complete, took him with him; and in the metropolis he found plenty of things to occupy his attention and fill up his days and nights. The visit proved a much longer one than was at first anticipated, and it was not until the 2nd of December that they started for home.

For a week the weather had been dry and cold, so that the roads were once more in fair walking condition—a fact that Ada Woodville was not slow in taking advantage of. Naturally Jack had thought a good deal about her while he had been away, but not so much as he would have done had he been at home. On his return, however, all the old love and longing came back, and he was all impatience to see her face once more. On the following evening, therefore, he made his way towards Netherby Hall, ostensibly to see Dick; really, to see Ada.

The day had been warm and bright, but towards the middle of the afternoon a thick fog had come on, with almost unexampled suddenness; shutting out every glimpse of the surrounding country and rendering locomotion in the narrow country lanes anything but pleasant.

"I do hate these fogs," Jack said to himself, as he peered cautiously ahead; "they are so fearfully bewildering. God help the folks crossing the moors on an evening like this!"

For himself he had no fear. The way to Netherby Hall was definite enough, and he could not possibly get lost, unless he deliberately climbed over the hedge, which he had no intention of doing.

At Netherby Hall he received a hearty and unmistak able welcome, and found the genial warmth of the bright, if somewhat gaudy drawing-room, most grateful, after the oppressive gloom outside. All the members of the family were present except Ada Woodville, and when at length Jack ventured to inquire after her, Kate informed him, in her stately way, that "the child was in her own room, and was doubtless hugging her knees in the firelight, contentedly dreaming."

"A very pleasant occupation," Jack suggested, "especially on such a dismal evening," and then the conversation drifted to general topics, till Jack had an opportunity of speaking alone to Dick on some trivial matter that served as an excuse for his calling.

Kate meanwhile left the room, but was not absent more than five minutes, when she returned with a white, scared face, and startled everyone present by announcing that Ada was not in her room, and that one of the maids had informed her that Miss Woodville went out early in the afternoon and had not returned.

"Are you sure she has not returned?" said Mrs. Netherby, starting from her chair, "you should not frighten us with such tidings unless you were quite certain. Go to her bedroom, and, if needs be, search every room in the house."

The search proved unavailing, as everyone feared it would. Jack waited, with his elbow on the mantel-piece, in a perfect agony of fear. But no sooner was it known that she had not returned from her walk, than he rushed out of the house without speaking to anyone, hurried to the stables, where he secured a lantern and a strong stick, and then made straight for the moors. He knew every step of the way, knew her favourite walks on the moors, and knew, too, where the dangerous places lay. Fortunately, though the night was intensely dark, the fog had somewhat lifted, or his lantern would have been of little use.

He neither saw nor felt the road that night. He ran like one in a dream, and was possessed of the strength of a giant. One agonising thought absorbed his whole being:—"Ada Woodville was lost on the moors, was dying perhaps, or dead. And he must find her—living or dead he must find her." And with this thought burning into his very brain, he ran on and on, utterly unconscious of weariness or fatigue.

He was conscious when he reached the fringe of the moors, though he never paused. A tall stile he cleared with a bound, and then, like a bloodhound on a certain trail, he pushed forward still. A narrow path, between banks of heather, lay, straight as a rule, before him for a quarter of a mile; then the path divided, and from these, other paths branched out in all directions. Here, doubtless, in the fog she had got bewildered. From this point she had wandered away, but in what direction? Far away into the black night stretched miles of bewildering heather and bog. And she, perhaps, was wandering hopelessly on and on, crying, like a startled child in the night for help

that never came. Or, worse still, perhaps, was lying exhausted or dead on those treacherous and desolate wilds.

Here, at the parting of the ways, Jack paused, and with his lantern held low, searched carefully for footsteps in the boggy soil, but he could discover no mark that helped him in his search.

"Heaven help her, and me," he said, drawing himself up to his full height, and in that agonising moment his awakening was completed. He knew now that he loved her, loved her with all the strength of his heart and soul! The secret of the change that had come over him was clear as day. Ada Woodville was dearer to him than his life, and without her, life would be a burden and a blank.

"And yet I stand here like a block of wood," he said to himself, "while she perhaps is perishing"; then raising his voice to it's highest pitch, he called "Ada! Ada! Ada!"

But no answer came out of the darkness, but the swish of the wind in the heather, or the flutter of the nightbird's wing, startled from its nest.

"If she has strayed into Boggart Clough, she will not hear me, though I call all night," he muttered. "I must go and search"; and, suiting the action to the word, he started forward once more. He had to be cautious; for the way was boggy and uncertain, and the light from his lantern scarcely penetrated a yard before him. At length, after what seemed to him an interminable period, he reached the brink of the clough, a deep gully that had been fretted away by the action of water. The sides were steep and uncertain, the edge ragged and treacherous,

while the gully was being continually widened by landslips, which broke away at any moment, and in the most unexpected places.

Along the edge of this clough Jack crept cautiously, with his head bent low, and his lantern almost touching the ground. He knew the dangerous character of the soil. Knew that the ground might slip from beneath his feet at any moment. But he was not to be deterred, though certain destruction awaited him, he would still go on.

At length he paused, while a startled expression swept over his face; was that a moan he heard? He lifted up his head and listened. The night wind was still whistling through the heather, and far down the clough was the faint gurgle of falling water. Perhaps the boggarts were coming out, for they held carnival on such a night as this he had heard. But, hist!—

That was surely a faint cry of some kind. "Ada!" he called, bending over the dark edge of the clough; and he held up his finger in a listening attitude.

"Help, oh, help!" came in faint accents from the dark gulf below. "I am coming, my darling," he called; and the next moment he had slipped over the edge of the clough, and was sliding swiftly down its slimy banks to the bottom.

Fortunately, the side was not so steep but that he could control himself easily, and when he reached the bottom he was little the worse for the adventure.

Here he paused, and called again, "Ada, where are you?"

But a low moan, almost close to him, was the only answer. Instantly he sprang forward in the direction from whence the sound came, and soon discovered the object of his search half hidden in a pool of water, and utterly powerless to raise herself.

Dropping his lantern and stick, Jack stooped, and caught her up in his strong arms, and without asking a single question prepared to climb with her the slippery bank of the clough.

This he found to be utterly impossible, and with a groan of despair he sat down on a boulder with the still unconscious form of Ada Woodville in his arms.

"I fear I cannot get you out of this place, Miss Woodville," he said at length; for somehow he shrank from calling her Ada now. It might seem as though he were taking advantage of her helplessness.

But she made no reply to his remark.

"Do you not hear me?" he said, bending his face close to her's. But the pale lips did not move. She lay in his arms as though she were dead.

"Heaven help us," he muttered, and he gazed round him in the darkness as though in mute appeal for help. His lantern had gone out, and the night was as dark as ever. No sound broke the stillness, save the sound of rippling water in the clough, and the soft rush of the night wind high above his head.

"If she were able to walk ever so little," he said to himself, "it might be managed. But if she continues in this state we shall be both of us dead by morning."

A moment later Ada gave a little shudder, then a low moan escaped her lips.

"Thank heaven she's coming to," Jack murmured, and pressed her closer to his breast.

"Oh, where am I?" she called, at length. "Who are you, and what is this place?"

"Don't alarm yourself, Miss Woodville," Jack answered tenderly. "You got lost on the moors. Don't you remember?"

"Oh, yes, I know!" she said. "I got lost in the fog, and fell into the clough. Oh, please, Mr. Formby, get me out: they will be so anxious at home."

"Do you think you can walk at all?" he said, "for I have tried to carry you up the slippery side, and failed."

"Oh, I do not know," she said. "But I will try. I will do anything to get out of this place. It was wrong of me to come alone on the moors."

"Don't blame yourself," he said; "you could not help the fog coming on. I hope you are not hurt."

"I do not know," she said. "I feel so strange and weak, and I got frightened in this horrible place. Oh, you were good, Mr. Formby, to come to my rescue."

"Don't talk about that now, please," said Jack, "but try and stand by yourself. Does it pain you?"

"Oh, no, I think I can walk a little."

"Try your very best," he said, cheerfully, "and I think we will manage yet."

How they reached the top he never knew. It was a life and death struggle, and but for the energy born of the great love he bore Ada Woodville, he would have given up in despair.

She had little strength left for the struggle, though she was wonderfully brave and hopeful. Holding fast with their nails, they fought their way up inch by inch, and when at length they reached the top, Jack raised a great cry, "Help! help!" and five minutes later Dick Netherby and several keepers came upon the scene, and found them both unconscious.

CHAPTER VI.

RANDOM SHOTS.

N the following day Jack Formby felt little, if any, the worse for his adventure. Ten hours of unbroken sleep had completely restored his exhausted energies, and when he sauntered out into the garden after his late breakfast, he was disposed to think very lightly of the part he had played on the previous evening.

It was by no means a pleasant morning, and after making the round of the stables, he returned to what he called his "den," a small room that had once borne the more ambitious name of "study." Here he threw himself into a deep easy chair and lit a cigar, and prepared to kill time in his usual fashion.

. He certainly looked the very picture of contentment as, with eyes half closed and feet on the fender, he watched in dreamy fashion the smoke wreaths curling above his head. Naturally his thoughts turned to the events of the previous evening, and to a contemplation of the fact which he no longer attempted to hide, viz., that he was

in love with Ada Woodville. All that he had seen of her had tended to deepen his first impression, and strengthen his first attachment. Among all the women in the world, she, in his eyes, was fairest and best. He was sure that she was as good as she was beautiful, and to win her love would now be the crowning ambition of his life.

So far the Fates had been kind to him, and he had little doubt, considering his position, and especially the service he had rendered her, that she would receive his attentions with favour. What obstacle could there be in the way of their union? As far as he could discover, there was none. It is true she was poor—at least, his cousin Ralph had hinted as much to him. But that was no obstacle at all, seeing he would have enough for both. In the matter of birth and education she was quite his equal, and in the all-important question of love, he had every reason to think that she was not indifferent to him.

At first he was half disposed to regret that he had not declared his love before they made that life-and-death struggle to climb the clough side, but a little reflection convinced him that he had acted a much better part, and one that was much more likely to commend him to the object of his affection.

One thing, however, he was fully resolved upon, and that was to declare his passion at the first opportunity.

"My happiness will be complete when I know she loves me," he said to himself, and a pleasant smile lit up his handsome face, which, however, soon gave place to a more thoughtful expression, as he added, "I wish I were more worthy of her, and that's a fact. I'm just a great indolent ne'er-do-well, and nothing more. I wonder why

the Almighty fettered my spirit to such a clod, for I have a feeling sometimes that there are the makings of a man within me, and yet whenever I come to the point of making the effort I am like a bird that suddenly discovers that its wings have been clipped, and I drop down helpless and disheartened. But then what does it matter? There are plenty of people in the world to do all that wants doing without my aid, and I may as well take life easy."

This was always the finish of what Jack called his "better moments," and relighting his cigar, which he had allowed to go out, he proceeded to puff at it with more than usual energy.

He had scarcely finished his cigar when there came a knock at the door of his den, and a moment later Dick Netherby entered.

"What, Netherby!" said Jack, rising quickly from his chair, and advancing to meet his guest; "glad to see you."

"Let me say ditto," said Dick, "for I was afraid I might find you in bed, after last night's adventure."

"Oh, I think I am none the worse," said Jack, lightly; "but how is Miss Woodville?"

"Well, I hardly know," said Dick; "she is remaining in bed to-day, at any rate; but I think the shock to her nerves will be the worst of it."

"I hope her long exposure to the cold will leave no ill effects behind," Jack replied. "As regards myself I had no chance of getting cold."

"The governor wouldn't rest till I had come across to to see how you were," Dick answered, after a pause; "And I also received a further commission from Ada, to express to you her deep sense of your goodness in coming to her rescue. I don't know if I have used the right words or no, but that's the sense of it, at any rate and you can sort it out at your leisure."

"Thanks," said Jack with a drawl, and a serio-comic expression, "thanks, awfully, dear boy; but there was no necessity for it, I can assure you."

Dick made no reply to this. He was so thoroughly matter-of-fact himself, that he could never understand Jack when that individual was in his lighter vein. A somewhat awkward pause was in danger of ensuing, when Jack produced his cigar-case, and under the influence of the fragrant weed, conversation flowed freely for the next half-hour.

We shall not attempt to reproduce the conversation since it had no direct bearing upon our story. Jack was careful to say nothing to Netherby of his feelings towards Miss Woodville, and if Dick guessed his secret, he was too well bred to make any allusion to it.

Jack's hope of making an early declaration of his love was not realized, for the nervous shock in Ada's case was succeeded by a severe attack of rheumatic fever, and for fully two months she was unable to leave her room.

This was a severe disappointment to our here. In fact, it was the first great disappointment he had ever experienced in his life. He had always been allowed to have his own way, or, at least, with very few exceptions. So that he bore this disappointment with a very ill grace, and with every mark of impatience. For the first week he raved about his den like a caged lion, but when tidings reached him that Ada Woodville's life was in danger, he grew suddenly calm, and for the next month appeared to be, what the old butler called, "in the sulks."

Most days he walked leisurely across to Netherby Hall to enquire after Miss Woodville, but his manner was so unconcerned, and the few words he spoke, drawled out in such an indifferent way, that no one guessed the true state of his feelings.

During those days he saw very little of his father, and when he did see him, he was in no mood for conversation. It was understood that the markets were in a very uncertain state, and that very little confidence existed in the commercial world. There were whispers about, that Robert Formby was in danger of being badly bitten, indeed, some people affirmed, that he had been already "let in heavily." But such talk produced no uneasiness in the Bodelford exchange. The house of Robert Formby was looked upon as being as safe as the Bank of England.

Jack did not concern himself about his father or his silent ways. He was in little humour for talk himself, and so the days came and went with very little to break the dull monotony of his life, and without a care as far as the outside world was concerned.

Meanwhile, Ada Woodville had struggled safely through the acute stage of her disease, and began to feel the exquisite pleasure of returning health and strength. After all the pain she had suffered, is was "just bliss to live, she expressed it, and though she was yet so weak as to be utterly helpless, yet she was conscious as she lay dreamily watching the shadows play upon the wall, that her strength was gently flowing back, while daily every sense became more and more acute. As she looked back upon the weeks of suffering through which she had passed, everything seemed confused and chaotic. Even that terrible night upon the moors she had for awhile no distinct impression

of; while the people who came into her room and went away, the conversation that was sometimes carried on in her hearing, the sounds that floated into her room from the outside world, were but as faint impressions of a dream.

But with returning strength, the people who came to see her assumed a distinct individuality, the dreamy hum of conversation resolved itself into words and sentences, and the sounds from the outer world took shape and coherency, until the sense of hearing became almost painfully acute, and she found herself listening intently to every sound that found its way into her room.

One day a sound of footsteps on the gravelled drive below her window sent all the blood rushing to her neck and cheek in a crimson tide. She knew the footstep well, and waited eagerly for Jack Formby's voice to float up from the hall below, and then with a pleased smile upon her lips she whispered softly to herself, "He does not forget me, and I shall be able to see him soon."

He seemed to her like a very dear brother—at least, she flattered herself with that idea. He had always been so kind and gentle that she could not help liking him, and she would always look upon him as one of her dearest friends as long as she lived.

Of course he was not her ideal, so she had told herself a score of times, and so she had told Kate; and once, many weeks ago now, when Kate had hinted something about her throwing herself in his way, she had burst out in vehement denial, and declared that Mr. Formby could never be to her anything more than a friend; that she would be false to all that was best in her life, and to all the traditions of her family, even to think of uniting her life to a man who had no ambition and no object in life.

She meant it then. She meant it still, at least she imagined she did, which was much the same thing. The idea of Jack Formby in any other relationship than that of a friend had never crossed her mind.

During her illness no word of reproach or blame had passed the lips of any of the Netherby family, nor was any allusion made to Jack, or to the service he had rendered But when Ada was able to leave her bed once more, and sit before the window in the pale wintry sunshine, Kate found it difficult to repress her feelings any longer, and broadly hinted to Ada that she had paid dearly for her folly and indiscretion.

"I do not think I have been indiscreet in the sense you mean, Cousin Kate," Ada answered, with heightened colour.

"Of course allowance must be made, darling, for your primitive mode of life ere you came to Netherby Hall," Kate answered, with scarcely concealed sarcasm. "And then the prospect of having a handsome and pleasant companion in one's rambles, must be a strong inducement to such an impressionable little saint as our cousin happens to be."

"That is almost unkind of you, Cousin Kate," Ada answered, feeling the warm blood tingle to her finger-tips. "You know I love the country for its own sake. And the moors remind me of home; while that afternoon on which I got lost I did not know but that Mr. Formby was in London."

"Fie, fie, little cousin," said Kate, coming forward, and kissing her on the forehead, "you must not get excited or I shall have to leave you alone; I am not blaming you for admiring Jack Formby."

"I cannot help getting excited while you throw out such hints," Ada answered with warmth. "I admit that I like Mr. Formby very much as a friend, but you know that I do not admire him in the sense you mean."

"I have heard you say so before," Kate answered with a smile. "But since he has saved your life, you will surely be able to overlook any failings he may have, and—and——"

"And what, Cousin Kate?" Ada asked promptly.

"Oh, well, on second thoughts, I think I had better not say," Kate answered complacently, "for really it will be hard for you to have to eat all your words when the time comes."

"You talk in riddles, Kate," Ada answered sharply; "What time do you refer to, and what words will I have to eat?"

"My sweet cousin, you should not get so excited," Kate answered, with the same provoking coolness. "You cannot be so blind to Mr. Formby's admiration of you, and of course he will follow up his advantage, and then, why our sweet little Ada will never be so hardhearted as to reject a lover that saved her life, and so a wedding in the fall; won't it be exquisite?" and Kate clapped her hands in apparent delight, while Ada bit her lips and looked vexed.

"You have thrown out hints of this before," Ada answered at length; "And I have told you that it can never be, even supposing Mr. Formby cares for me, which I do not for a moment believe. I could never, with my views of the seriousness and sacredness of this life, consent to—"

[&]quot;Now, don't, don't," said Kate, interrupting her; "Think

of all these heroic utterances you will have to swallow, and forbear."

"I will not forbear," said Ada, stung almost to desperation; "I will never marry a man I cannot admire and reverence. Mr. Formby is kind and considerate, and, more than that, he has saved my life, and for that I owe him a debt of gratitude I can never repay; but before I could marry him, he must wholly change, or I must."

Kate laughed a little mocking laugh, and then answered, "The change, my darling, will be easily wrought; for love, they say, will transmute the commonest metal into purest gold."

"I really cannot think what motive you can have in making me talk in this way," Ada answered, after a pause. "But if your own affections lie in that direction, you need not fear that I shall stand in the way."

In a moment Kate's face flushed crimson, while the mocking smile vanished from her face as if by magic, and, drawing herself up to her full height, she said, in her severest manner, "Never speak in that way again, Ada."

"My dear cousin," said Ada, with mock seriousness, "you should not get excited. Moreover, those who banter others should expect to be bantered themselves."

"Quite right, quite right," Kate answered, recovering herself by a sudden effort, and beaming on Ada with her old supercilious smile; "but you quite startled me with your foolish speech. So we will drop the subject, if you have no objection."

"None at all," said Ada.

And a few minutes later, under some excuse, Kate had left the room.

CHAPTER VIL

A CONFESSION OF LOVE.

BOUT a month after the conversation recorded in the last chapter, Ada found herself one sunshinv afternoon sitting in the big window of the drawing-room alone. The other members of the family, taking advantage of the fine weather, had gone out on various errands, leaving Ada to entertain herself with fancy-work or with books. She was not at all sorry at being thus left alone, and though she regretted that the keen, searching East wind still kept her a prisoner, yet she was not disposed to grumble. From her seat in the window, she could command an extensive view of the country, which, in spite of the sunshine that was flooding valley and hill, looked winterly and bare. In the valley below, glimpses of the Bodel could be seen flashing in the sunshine, and on the other side, just where the valley took its bend, the smoke could be seen rising from the chimneys of Ryecroft—the beautiful home of Jack Formby.

She had been trying to read earlier on, but the effort

was, evidently, too much for her, for she had laid the book aside with a sigh, and was now sitting with her elbows on the arm of the chair, and her chin in her hands, gazing dreamily out over the broad expanse of hill and dale.

It was little, however, that she saw of the landscape She was too busy with her thoughts to pay much heed to anything else; nor were her thoughts altogether pleasant, One or two things had transpired during the last few weeks that had perplexed her greatly. She had noticed that when Jack Formby had called at the house, she had frequently not been informed of the fact until he had gone again, and though she had met him several times, there had always been company present, so that she had never yet had an opportunity of thanking him as she desired to do for the service he had rendered her. when Ralph Formby had called, it had always happened somehow, that the other members of the family were busy, so that she had frequently been left alone with him as much as an hour on the stretch. This had become so marked that she could not fail to notice it. Moreover, Ralph Formby had begun to pay her more attention than was pleasant to her. And though she had always regarded him as almost her ideal of an English gentleman, the idea of his being her lover was positively distasteful to her. As a friend she liked him very much. She admired his handsome presence, his agreeable manners, and more than all his large-hearted philanthropy, of which she had heard But to have him near her, speaking soft words of flattery, seemed so little in harmony with his true self, that it gave her positive pain.

She began to feel after awhile that she was the object of a small conspiracy. That Kate and Mrs. Netherby, as well as Ralph Formby, were working towards one end, and naturally she resented any such interference.

It seemed very evident that a little plot had been laid to keep her and Jack Formby apart, while Kate, with deliberate purpose, had got her to speak of him after the manner she had done. She regretted, now, that she had not been more guarded over her tongue, for, whatever might happen, she could never go back, unless she could submit to the humiliation of "eating her own words."

Not that she supposed she would ever desire to go back, for, from the hints she heard from time to time, Jack showed no disposition to amend his ways. Indeed, from all accounts, he was more idle and lethargic than ever. Still, whatever he might be, he had been a good friend to her—had rendered her a service that she could never forget, and she resented any attempt on the part of Kate or anyone else to keep them apart.

"Kate shall see, when the fine weather comes," she said to herself, "whether I am to be treated as a child, or as though I had no will of my own. Let these East winds get over, and I will be out on the hills and moors again, and then—why, then we shall see," and she laughed softly to herself, as though the idea of thwarting her cousin and spoiling her little plans would be a very pleasant affair.

The next moment she turned her head with a start, as a footstep on the gravelled drive outside fell upon her ear.

"It's Mr. Formby himself," she said, rising from her chair, and clasping her hands, while the warm blood suffused her neck and face. "Shall I see him or shall I not?" and for a moment she stood irresolute, with her eyes bent upon the floor.

The next moment she drew herself up proudly. "What a bundle of contradictions I am," she whispered softly. "Here have I been for weeks almost longing to see him, and to thank him; and now, when I have the opportunity I have so long wanted, I hesitate. Of course, I will see him, come what may. But Kate thought he was from home, or she would not have left me alone this afternoon."

The next moment one of the maids entered with Jack Formby's card.

"Shew Mr. Formby in," she said, and advanced towards the door to greet him.

For a few seconds Jack seemed the more embarrassed of the two, and stammered out some lame apology for calling at such a time. But Ada's genial welcome soon put him at his ease, and with careless grace he dropped into a large chair in front of the fire, and began to talk in his old careless style, as though being alone with Ada was the most natural thing in the world.

Naturally, the talk turned on the weather, and Ada expressed the hope that she would soon be able to get out on the hills again.

"Do you know, Mr. Formby," she said, "I have been quite envious of you for weeks past?"

"Envious of me!" he said, lifting his eyebrows in surprise.

"I have indeed," she said. "While I have been a prisoner, shut up in one room, you have been able to take your accustomed rambles, and commune with nature to your heart's content."

"Oh, I haven't had a ramble on the hills for months past," he said, with blunt truthfulness, "never, in fact, since that night you got lost."

"Why, how is that?" she said, looking surprised. "I thought you were so fond of roaming over the moors and hills"

"Well, so I am," he said, hesitatingly, and in some confusion, "that is, I am under certain circumstances."

"Oh you mean," she said, "that you are fond of the country only in the summer and autumn time, when the fells and moors are in all their glory of foliage and colour?"

"Well, no, not exactly that either," he said, shifting uneasily in his chair; "the fact is, Miss Woodville, I am not such an enthusiastic worshipper of nature as you have imagined."

"Well, you do surprise me," she said, looking a little pained. "I thought you were as passionately fond of the hills and moors as I am."

"Well, I am fond of them after a fashion," he said. "But candidly, the exertion of a long ramble alone is too much for me."

"But the exertion was not too much for you last summer," she answered.

"And cannot you guess the reason of that, Miss Woodville?" he asked.

"Indeed, I cannot," she replied.

"Then I fear I must own to have been a sad hypocrite," he said, with some little hesitation, yet with an earnestness of tone that carried the full meaning of his words to Ada's mind and heart.

For a moment she did not reply. She seemed to be struggling with some deep emotion, and when she spoke again her voice was low and tremulous.

"I have a duty to perform, Mr. Formby," she said, "a duty which has been too long delayed, and yet the

delay has not been through any fault of mine. You must not think, because I have been silent, that I am insensible of the obligation under which I am laid to you, or that I am ungrateful for the great kindness—aye, more than kindness—that you have showed me. I know that I owe my life to you, Mr. Formby, and I take this, the first opportunity I have had of thanking you, and thanking you from my heart."

He did not attempt to interrupt her while she was speaking, nor did he reply for several seconds. He kept his eyes steadily fixed upon the fire, as though debating what answer he should make.

Ada watched him narrowly, and almost admiringly. She had not often seen him with his head uncovered, or with such a serious expression upon his face. Certainly there was nothing weak or vacillating in his appearance. The broad open forehead, the clearly cut profile, the finely chiselled mouth and chin, gave unmistakable evidence, if physiognomy counted for anything, of strength and determination. How was it that his character so belied his face? How was it that such a handsome presence was allied to such an indolent and unworthy life? "I am sure he would be noble under other conditions," she said to herself, and then almost started as he turned his eyes suddenly upon her and spoke out the words that were in his heart.

"You know, Miss Woodville," he said slowly, "that I do not desire thanks, and yet—I will not deny it—your words are sweet to me; but sweeter still is the knowledge that I have been permitted to be of some little service to you. I would willingly have died for you on the moors if that would have saved your life."

"Nay, do not interrupt me," he said, seeing she was about to speak. "Hear me out as I heard you, and then speak on. You know that I am not much given to sentiment or romance, and until I saw you I never thought of love. But from our first meeting you have stirred my heart in some strange way, and the impression made at our first meeting has been deepening ever since. I did not know what it meant until that night you were lost on the moors. It was then only that I woke up to the fact that I loved you with all the strength of my nature. I never loved before. I do not think I shall ever love again. You to me are above all else in the world, and whether you ever love me in return or no, I shall love you all the same, and go on loving you until I die; and if there is any world beyond this, why, I shall love you there.

"I see you are surprised that I talk to you in this matter-of-fact fashion, but I have been schooling myself to patience for months past, and have decided long since what I would say to you if ever I had the opportunity of speaking with you alone.

"Now, hear one word more, and then I will be silent—aye, silent till death, if you wish it. I know that I am not worthy of you—I am full of faults, with scarcely a redeeming quality—but if you could love me ever so little, I think I might become worthy of you pernaps in time—I do not know—but at least I could try, and with your love to inspire me, what might I not do?

"Ah, you are afraid to trust me—I see it in your eyes Well, be it so. If I cannot do, I can bear and suffer; and if you send me forth comfortless, I will go, and will not murmur."

When he had done speaking he turned his face towards the fire once more, and seemed to be communing with himself rather than waiting for her reply.

For awhile she could not speak; his words had stabbed her like arrows, and showed her how false had been her estimate of him. This was no weak-headed, vacillating youth that had spoken love to her, but a strong, patient, determined man—a man of high principle and dauntless courage, a man to whom any woman might be proud to give her love—and yet she must send him away without a word of hope. She knew that she might love him—aye, perhaps she loved him now—only she had not courage to question her heart. But after what she had said to Kate, she could not go back.

No, she could not go back; but might she not speak to him as freely as he had spoken to her? Tell him that she could never link her life to one who had no purpose in the world, no enterprise, and no ambition; but that, if he would leave his old life behind him, and start on a different course, break through his indolence and sloth, and give the powers he undoubtedly possessed a chance, then, perhaps, he might hope.

"You do not speak," he said, at length rising from his chair and buttoning his coat over his broad chest. "I had hoped that you were not altogether indifferent to me."

"Oh, Mr. Formby," she said, almost passionately, "do not think I am ungrateful, or that I am insensible of the honour you do me; but I cannot now promise what you ask," with an emphasis on the "now."

But he did not heed the emphasis. The word "cannot" fell on his ears like the death-knell of his hopes; and, without another word, and without giving Ada the chance

of explaining, he moved slowly toward the door like one in a dream, and passed out into the hall and out of the house.

He almost stumbled over Mrs. Netherby and Kate, but he did not heed them; indeed, he did not see them. The secret hope that he had cherished so long had been suddenly dashed to the ground, and all the world for the time being had become a blank. He walked away towards Ryecroft, unconscious of every surrounding, and when he reached his own "den" he could not remember a step of the way which he had come, nor whether he had met any one on the road.

Locking the door, he threw himself into his favourite chair, and lit a cigar, but more from force of habit than from any desire to smoke. Yet he might have done many a worse thing. The mild narcotic helped to soothe his nerves, and by the time his father returned he was himself once more, and by a tremendous effort even brought himself to discuss the political situation, which, in view of the fact that Parliament had just been dissolved, was absorbing every one's attention.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN THE FERNERY.

EANWHILE Ada was enduring the pitiless banter of her Cousin Kate, who had burst into the room like a small tempest, and began talking and pulling off her gloves at the same time. "So he has proposed, and you have rejected him," she said, whirling about the room heedless of Ada's pitiful face. "Oh, you cruel little darling. How could you have dared to do such a thing; and he such a good chance too. A chance in a lifetime, as one might say, and the like of which you are never likely to have again. Do tell me how he looked when you declined the honour?"

"Who said I had declined the honour?" said Ada with flashing eyes. "Have you been listening at the door?" At which Kate burst into quite a loud peal of laughter.

"Oh, you sweet innocent darling," she said, "what a naïve confession; and so it is quite true, is it? Of course, you told him that your views of life were of such a lofty and heroic order, that you could not condescend to link your life to such a prosaic, commonplace, and useless individual?"

"No, I did not tell him anything of the sort," Ada replied hotly, "and I think it is unkind of you to speak in the way you do."

"Oh, I cannot help it, darling, and you should not be offended. But you see, I met him in the hall, and he had such an awfully woe-begone appearance, that I could not help putting two and two together, and reading you a little lecture as well on your cruelty."

"I think it is you that are cruel," Ada retorted, "and I really do not see what right you have to put two and two together in any such a way."

"But how could I help it?" said Kate, still laughing "He nearly stumbled over me in the hall, and I am quite sure he did not see me, and when I said 'Good afternoon, Mr. Formby,' he neither heard nor answered, but just walked straight on as a somnambulist might have done. I really felt sorry for the poor fellow, I am sure he is quite heart-broken."

"In which case you will have an opportunity of binding it up for him," Ada answered, and without waiting for a reply, swept out of the room.

For the rest of the day she steadfastly refused to see anyone except her own maid, and excused herself from going down to dinner on the plea that she had a bad headache, and was anxious to be quiet and alone. All of which was quite true.

Kate heard the excuse with a curl of the lip, and quietly remarked: "It is more likely she has heartache." In truth she had both, but she kept her heart-troubles to herself, and nursed her grief in secret. An awakening was coming to her, if it had not already come. She discovered that the liking she had always felt for Jack

Formby had drawn perilously near to love. He was more to her than any other friend she had. Aye—and better and nobler than all the others, now that she had been able to see beneath the hard crust off his outer self.

His afternoon's talk was more than a confession of love, it was also a revelation of himself. He had discovered to her possibilities of greatness and strength, that she had hardly dreamed that he possessed. She had always liked him, but never admired him; so she had said to herself a hundred times over. But now, all unconsciously, the warp of liking was being crossed by the weft of admiration, and love, or something very near akin to it, was being woven by the process.

How could she help regretting under the circumstances that she had been so hasty in her judgment, and so ready to fall into the trap that Kate had laid for her. If she had only kept her own counsel, and suspended her judgment until she knew Jack better, both of them might have been happier than they were at present.

He had gone away without a word of hope. And she was left in doubt and pain; and she knew enough of him now to know, that he would bear his disappointment in silence, and in all probability would never speak to her of love again.

Perhaps it was better so. Perhaps it was well that they should be only friends; she thought so once. But she was not certain of it now, and the more she debated the question the more perplexing it became, and the worse her headache grew, until at length, in utter weariness of mind and body, she stole quietly into bed and tried to forget her heartache in sleep.

During the next few weeks Ada was left in peace.

Kate began to see that there was danger lest she should carry her banter too far, and so thwart the very object she had in view. Moreover, her brother Dick would celebrate his twenty-fifth birthday early in April, and rejoice at the same time in the full possession of a fortune left him by an old uncle. Consequently, his twenty-fifth birthday was to be celebrated with great pomp, and Kate had her hands full in preparing for the same.

With the advancing spring Ada's strength perceptibly increased, and by the end of March she was able to get out into the lanes and fields again. No prisoner ever hailed his liberty with more delight than Ada hailed those bright, sunny days. She felt, she said, like a bird let out of a cage, and went rambling hither and thither in sheer gladness and delight. If there was a shadow at all upon her life, it was to be found in the fact that Jack Formby was not exactly what he used to be. It was only now and then that she met him, and he never offered to accompany her on her rambles. And yet he was as pleasant and genial and generous as he had ever been, if their paths should happen to lie in the same direction. It was when they happened to meet, and he did not offer to turn back or to go a step out of his way, that she felt the change.

Had she known him less well, she might have been inclined to think that he never really cared much for her. But he had shown his heart too truly for her to doubt him. Hence his silence and self-repression but tended to increase her admiration of him, and too deepen her regard.

One thing she regretted still, and would never cease to regret while the cause remained, and that was that his life seemed as useless and purposeless as ever. While his father was wearying his brain in the great city of Bodelford from morning till night, and taxing his strength to the utmost limit of endurance, Jack simply did nothing, and to all appearance cared for nothing. No lofty ambition stirred his heart or fired his imagination. He loitered lazily through life, undisturbed by the commercial depression, or by the political activity and excitement. Dick Netherby was in the thick of the political fight, and Ralph Formby to the forefront of nearly every social and philanthropic movement. But Jack, with abilities, as she believed greater than either, was just allowing his talents to run to rust, and might as well be out of the world as in it, for any good he had done or was likely to do.

Could she help him? That was a question that had perplexed her greatly. He had told her that he was not worthy of her, but if she would give him hope he would try to make himself worthy. Ought she not, then, to have given him that word of hope that he desired? So she puzzled herself from day to day, and so, almost unconsciously, she gave Jack the largest place in her thoughts; and, as the inevitable consequence, her strong affection for him gradually deepened into love.

Dick's birthday party was a great success. Nearly every family in the neighbourhood was represented, besides which there was a large sprinkling from Bodelford. Jack Formby appeared in the best of spirits, and danced, Kate declared, with every eligible young lady present—with one notable exception, and that Ada Woodville. Jack had not intended this as a slight. On the contrary, he thought he would be consulting her wishes in so doing, and had no idea that she would feel hurt at his apparent neglect. She was too proud, how-

ever, to betray her feelings either by word or look, and, during the whole of the evening, appeared to be in unusually good spirits.

Kate was quick to notice how matters stood. So also was Mr. Ralph Formby, and while the latter paid more than usual attention to Ada, Kate was particularly gracious with our hero.

About midnight all the guests adjourned to the supperroom for refreshments, where Jack remained but a few minutes. He was weary both in mind and body. All the night he had been acting a part he did not feel, and was longing for a few moments of quiet and repose. For this purpose he stole away as soon as he could do so without attracting attention, and made for the conservatory, where he thought he would be able to have a quiet smoke all to himself.

Starting at right angles from the main body of the conservatory was the fernery—an arrangement of rocks and dripping water, and any number of odd corners, where one could easily hide if he felt so disposed. Jack knew the place well, and was soon sitting quite alone in the darkness, pulling steadily at his cigar.

Now, whether it was that he was too busy with his thoughts, or whether there was no pleasure in smoking when he could not see the smoke, certain it is that he let the cigar go out ere one third of it was consumed, and sat staring into the darkness as still and moveless as a block of wood.

In the adjoining conservatory he heard for a while the murmur of voices and the trailing of dresses on the floor, but soon all grew quiet again, and still he sat on, indifferent to the flight of time, and unconcerned as to what the other guests might think of his absence. Indeed, so absorbed did he become in his own thoughts, that he did not notice that some of the guests had returned again to the conservatory, and were carrying on an animated conversation almost close to the entrance of the fernery.

At length he started and sat bolt upright, as the mention of his own name fell upon his ears. His first impulse was to rush out of the fernery, and most likely he would have done so but that the words that followed the mention of his name had a peculiar fascination for him, and seemed to hold him spellbound. Moreover, he had already sat within hearing of the conversation for some considerable time, and though he had not heeded a single sentence, it would be difficult to explain how that could be. "I wish I could escape without betraying myself," was his thought. But that was impossible. Moreover, the questions and answers had followed each other so rapidly that even while he debated what to do he had heard the very conversation that was never intended for his ears.

"I may as well keep quiet," was his second thought, "and hear the tattle ont." So he sat on in the darkness with every sense keenly awake now, and yet with an uneasy feeling of guilt, such as he had never before experienced.

There were three ladies engaged in the conversation, but only one voice did he recognise, and that the voice of Kate Netherby.

"There can be no doubt that Jack Formby proposed to her," he heard Kate say, "and it is equally certain that she refused him."

"But how did you get to know that?" one of the

speakers asked, "for it seems to me that Ada is very reticent on the subject."

"Well, you see," Kate answered, "he came over one afternoon when we were all out, and from what Simmons says he must have sat with her more than an hour. I have known all along that he was fond of her, and, more than that, that she is fond of him."

"Then how do you explain her rejecting him?" asked the two voices in chorus.

"Oh, I will explain that by-and-bye," Kate answered, with a little laugh. "But let me tell you first how I got to know he had proposed to her. I happened to return home just as he was leaving, and met him full tilt in the hall. But, bless you, he might have been blind. He passed straight out of the house without noticing me, but with such a look of hopeless misery on his face as I had never seen. I knew in a moment what had happened, and so rushed straight into the drawing-room and charged Ada with it, and, of course, she was not able to deny it."

"At any rate," said one of the speakers, "neither of them seems to be much troubled about the matter. I have never seen them in better spirits than they are to-night."

"Oh, that is largely put on," said Kate, gaily. "But I daresay they will get over it. I hope they will, for poor Mr. Ralph will not make much headway while Ada keeps worrying herself about Jack."

"Is Mr. Ralph very fond of her?" one of the ladies asked.

"Oh, yes, I think he likes her well enough," Kate answered. "I know someone he likes better" (with a little laugh), "but that someone is out of his reach, and

so he is turning his attention to Ada. She has a nice fortune in her own right, you know, and Ralph is poor, and so naturally he is looking out for money."

"And are you willing for Ada to sacrifice herself to nim?" one of the speakers asked, in some surprise.

"I think it would be a very good match," Kate an swered, sharply. "He is well connected, and quite a gentleman, besides which he is a noted philanthropist in his own way. He is secretary to the societies for sending tracts to the Kamschatkans, for the Evangelisation of Borneo, for the Fertilisation of Sahara, for the Rescue of the Street Arabs of Damascus, and for I don't know how many other societies, and all this, you know, is in Ada's line. She greatly admires all philanthropists, and would be very happy, I have no doubt, in helping Ralph in his work."

"Still, I cannot understand," one of the ladies persisted, "if she is fond of Jack Formby, as you say she is, why she has refused him."

"Well, the truth is this," Kate answered, and she dropped her voice just a little: "Ada has what I call very heroic notions about life and duty. She thinks that every man in the world, however rich he may be, should do something; should have a mission, you know. And a man who idles his life away is to her almost a heathen. Indeed, she once told me that she would be false to her highest convictions and to the traditions of her family, were she to link her life to a man who, like Jack Formby, just loitered through life in idleness."

"Oh, she is of that way of thinking, is she !" interposed one of the ladies.

"That's her precisely," answered Kate. "She has read

Ruskin and Carlyle to such an extent, that she is just full of the most stupid notions imaginable. At least, I think so. Still, you can quite understand her reasons for rejecting Jack Formby; for he is, in this respect at least, her aversion: he takes no interest in anything. Politics, commerce, and religion are all alike to him. I don't think he goes to church five times a year, on an average. So that you can see clearly that, however fond Ada may be of him, in marrying him she would have to sacrifice every principle she has professed so ardently."

"At any rate," said one of the speakers, "I do not think there are many other girls who would fling up so good a chance on such a pretext."

"Do you mean that for me?" Kate asked, with a laugh.

"Oh, dear, no; not at all," was the answer; "though, if the cap suits you, you know you can wear it."

"Thank you," said Kate; "but it doesn't fit in the least. But don't you think we have been gossiping long enough? I propose that we return to the ball-room at once."

"Yes, I think we had better get back," was the reply. And the next moment the trio moved silently away, much to Jack's comfort; for he was getting cramped and tired with sitting still so long, and felt that if they stayed much longer he would be compelled to reveal himself.

He did not return to the ball-room; he was too excited, too angry with himself and everybody else. Watching his opportunity, he stole quietly out of the house, and made his way towards Ryecroft with all possible haste.

CHAPTER IX.

A NEW EXPERIENCE.

OR several days after the party Jack remained in a very unenviable state of mind. His faith had been shaken in everybody, and, most of all, in himself. Kate Netherby, he considered, had revealed an amount of meanness in her treatment of Ada that was most discreditable to her; nor was he at all certain that Ada had not departed from her own strict code of honour in her treatment of him. Ralph Formby had told what appeared to be a deliberate falsehood in saying that Ada was penniless; while the Netherbys generally were not altogether "jannack," to use the Lancashire vernacular, in helping Ralph's suit and opposing his.

"I will have it out with Ralph," he said, savagely, on reaching his "den" on the night of the party. "He will either have to explain his words or I shall treat him, for the future, as he deserves—though," he added, a moment later, "I suppose eaves-dropping will be considered by most people quite as great an offence as fibbing."

During the next three or four days he saw nothing of

the Netherbys or of Ada Woodville. In the meanwhile, however, he had plenty of time for reflection, as well as for maturing any plans he might have made.

It was about a week after the party, when, rambling on the edge of the moors, he came face to face with Ada. She was walking along with listless step, and eyes bent upon the ground, so that she did not notice him until he was close upon her. For a moment both felt considerably embarrassed. Each felt that there was an amount of shyness or coldness existing between them that was anything but exhilirating.

Jack was the first to recover himself, though it was only by a tremendous effort that he did so.

"Look here, Miss Ada," he said, in his blunt, abrupt fashion: "we may be friends, may we not? Of course, it is impossible to forget what has passed between us. Still, that is no reason, surely, why we should not be friends still."

"I should be very sorry indeed to think that our friendship was at an end," she answered frankly. "Indeed, you will always be a friend to me, whatever may happen."

"I am glad to hear you say that," he said, with a smile; and he lifted his hat and pushed his fingers through his brown locks. "I had hoped once for something better; but that hope, I suppose, must perish."

It was a random shot, and he watched eagerly its effect; but, with the exception of a sudden dropping of the eyelids, she betrayed no emotion, nor did she make any answer.

"May I walk along with you?" he said, after a somewhat awkward pause.

"I should be very glad indeed of your company" she

answered, while the faintest flush imaginable mounted to her cheeks.

For a few hundred yards they walked in silence; then Jack suddenly blurted out, as though by a tremendous effort—

- "I overheard a bit of gossip the other day, Miss Ada."
- "Indeed," she answered, but without lifting her eyes.
- "No matter how or when," he went on, "but as it related partly to yourself, I cannot help mentioning it, though very likely you will consider me ill-mannered for so doing. But the hope I cherished was so dear to me that it is hard to relinquish it altogether."
- "I thought you were going to speak of some piece of gossip you had overheard," she said quietly.
- "Yes, that is so," he answered, with some little embarrassment. "It was to the effect that if I had only been a useful member of society, instead of being the wastrel I am, you might not have rejected my offer."
- "Excuse me, Mr. Formby," she said quickly, "that is a matter I have never spoken to anyone about; and no one has a right to say what might or might not have been."
- "Of course it was only a surmise," Jack said faintly, feeling that his hope was being dashed again. "But I thought if it contained any shadow of truth at all, I might still hope a little—that is, I might try to become a useful member of society. Try to do something, you know. Try to make myself worthy of you, so that in three, or four, of five years—supposing you were still free—you might permit me to plead my cause again."

He spoke wildly, almost despairingly. She had never seen him so agitated before, and for several moments she felt unable to reply. She was scarcely less agitated than he, and when she spoke at length, her voice was low and tremulous.

"I am sure," she said, "that you will feel that your question is a very embarrassing one. And yet, as you have been so frank with me, I think I ought to be equally frank with you. I will not deny, therefore, that I care for you more than for anyone else. I cannot forget that you have always been good to me, that once you saved my life, and as long as I live I shall think of you and care for you. Yet to be candid, I could not link my life to one who is serving no useful purpose in the world; who—shall I say it?—neither serves God nor his fellows. With my views of life, such a union would be a blunder in every sense of the word. No, Mr. Formby, I must not deny it, had your life been different, my answer to you would have been different. Is that sufficient to give you any hope for the future?"

"It is, Miss Ada," he said, impulsively seizing her hand at the same time and kissing it. "If anything will make a man of me, it is the hope of winning your love. I will begin this very day, and if I fail, think kindly of me. I have never loved but you. I shall never love another. God bless you, and may you be happy."

"I am sure no one will grieve more than I shall if you fail," she said, with a blush, "and no one will rejoice more than I if you succeed."

"The work will be difficult," he said almost sadly, "and the road to success will, I fear, be a long one, and, in the meanwhile, someone more worthy may win your love, and what shall I do then?"

"You should be noble," she answered, "for its own

sake, not for mine; and as for the future, that we must leave in the hands of God. To-day, and to-morrow, and each day as it comes, we must do what is right. The rest we must leave. We are in God's hands, Mr. Formby, and He will help us if we do our best."

"I have never thought much of that," he answered, with downcast eyes, "I have neglected religion, as I have neglected everything else. But from this day, God helping me, I start afresh, and I am not without hope that I shall succeed."

"I am glad you say 'God helping me,'" she answered with emotion, "for only by His help shall we conquer; and if you only trust in Him I am sure you will not fail."

"God bless you for your helpful words," he answered, "and now I will leave you. The way lies before me dark and uncertain, and something tells me the struggle will be hard, but the memory of those dear eyes of yours will ever be as stars of hope to me."

And he paused suddenly, and taking both her hands in his, he looked her steadily in the face for one brief moment. Then, by a sudden impulse, he drew her to his breast. She offered no resistance, nor did any word pass between them, but their lips met in one pure kiss of love, and in that moment of rapture each knew that for ever and ever they were one in heart, though their lives might drift far as the poles asunder.

No word was spoken after that, and when at length she lifted her drooping eyelids, Jack was gone.

For several seconds she stood quite still, as though trying to realize what had happened. It seemed so like a dream that she almost wondered if she had not fallen asleep there, in the sunshine, and dreamed it all. But, turning her head in the direction Jack had taken, she saw his stalwart form far down the hill-side, and pressing forward with firm and resolute steps.

"He is my love," she said, her heart giving a great bound at the same time. "And he will win, for he is brave, and we shall be happy yet."

Then slowly she wended her way homeward, a strange, sweet thrill in her heart, such as she had never experienced before. She never regretted for a moment what had taken place. He was her lover now, though they might never meet again, and she had confessed her love in a way that he could not fail to understand.

She had sent him forth with a great hope in his heart, to do and to dare, and in this she felt that she had acted a true woman's part. To redeem a life like his from selfishness and sloth would be an achievement worth living for, and so her heart was full of a sweet content, such as one always feels when he or she has done a true and worthy deed.

Little did she dream, or he, that that one kiss would mean such a long farewell. For the events that were so swiftly coming had cast no shadows before, or if they had, neither had eyes to see them.

The noon of that day was the brightest Jack had ever known, but the night that followed was the darkest of his life.

CHAPTER X.

OLOUDS AND DARKNESS.

HEN Jack reached his home, he found the house hold in a state of consternation. The servants were gliding hither and thither, with white, scared faces and perfectly noiseless footsteps; while no one seemed capable of speaking, except in the faintest and most mysterious whisper.

"Well, I wonder what is up now?" he said to himself, as he passed out of the side-door, and came face to face with the gardener.

"Oh, Blake," he said, "what's gone wrong with the maids, for they seem to have taken permanent leave of their senses?"

"Why don't you know, Mr. John?" said Blake, staring at him in surprise. "Haven't you heard what's happened?"

"I've heard nothing," said Jack. "Have they quarrelled, or lost something, or broken something, or killed somebody—what is it?"

"Oh, 'tis nothing 'bout the girls at all," said Blake; "it's about the master. Don't you know?"

"I tell you I know nothing," said Jack, impatiently. "Has he dismissed them in a lot? Come, out with it, man."

"Oh, no, it's worse than that," said Blake, brushing his hand across his eyes. "The master fell down sudden in his office just about lunch time."

"Fell down in his office!" said Jack, in a bewildered tone. "What do you mean?"

"He were took with a kind of fit or something, after hearing some bad news," said Blake, mysteriously; "and when they lifted him up, it were all over with him."

"All over with him?" gasped Jack. "Do you mean that my father is dead?"

"Yes, sir, that's the news that's been brought here," Blake answered, "but I thought you knew, sir, all about it."

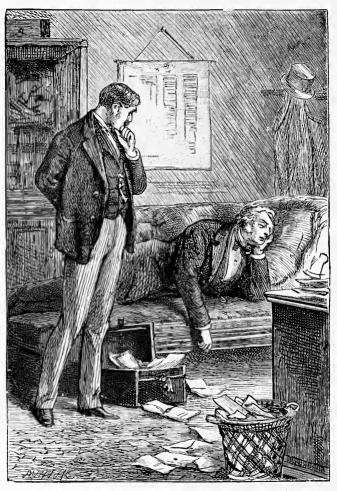
But Jack did not wait to reply or to hear anything further; rushing to the station at a headlong speed, he was, luckily, just in time to catch a fast train to Bodelford. Yet, such was his impatience, that it seemed to him as though the train would never reach its destination. He could not sit still: up and down the empty compartment, he walked with quick and agitated steps during all the journey; and when, at length, he reached the huge, busy terminus, he sprang out on the platform before the train stopped, and, jumping into a hansom, he was driven swiftly away to his father's office.

At the door he was met by the head clerk.

"Is it true? Is my father dead?" he gasped, not waiting for the clerk to speak.

"Yes, Mr. John, it is too true," was the answer; and the clerk turned away his head to hide the moisture that had gathered in his eyes.





HIE HEAD RESTING ON HIS HAND, HIS FACE CALM. - p. 85

For a moment Jack did not speak or move; then, by a great effort, he asked, "Where is he?"

"In his own private office, sir," was the answer, "would you like to see him, sir?"

And with a slight inclination of the head Jack followed the faithful old servant to where his father lay.

He might have been asleep, so easy and comfortable was the posture in which he lay, on the large leathercovered lounge. There was no sign of any death struggle. He had not fallen down as had been reported. down, a strange thing for him to do, and when found, he was quite dead; his head resting on his hand, his face calm and peaceful, his eyes closed. When last seen alive, he was in a state of great agitation, for he had received tidings of another fall in cotton, a pleasant bit of news to many people, but to him it meant bankruptcy and ruin. For months he had felt as though he were walking on the edge of a precipice. For months he had kept hoping, though the markets had steadily gone against him. now, all that he had dreaded most, had happened, and he was penniless. The shock, the ruin, and the disgrace, were more than he could bear; the troubled and weary spirit quietly slipped its cable, and drifted out to the great unknown.

There were whispers of poison, of a small phial found under the cushion, of hints he had dropped of what might be expected should the disaster he had expected overtake him. But nothing came of them. "Failure of the heart's action," was the doctor's sententious reply, and the jury returned a verdict of "death from natural causes."

The funeral was a very quiet one. There was nothing wasted in pomp or display; alas, there was nothing to waste.

Jack returned after the funeral to the home that was no longer his, and spent the afternoon in packing his portmanteaux. To-morrow he would have to go forth alone to fight for himself the battle of life. He had mourned for his father until he had no more tears to weep, and now, with resolute will, he was bracing himself for the struggle that lay before him. When he had finished his packing, he locked himself in his den, and gave himself up to reflection. A bright fire was burning in the grate, for the evening was chilly, and his large easy smoking-chair was drawn up almost close to the fender. What a cosy room it was, how bright and cheerful, how full of every comfort and luxury. Here he had spent some of the happiest hours he had known, albeit, hours of idleness and sloth Here, with his feet on the fender, and his eyes fixed on the fire, he had dreamed his dreams, and built his castles in the air. Alas, they had all vanished now, and he was thrown upon the world helpless and alone.

He had not a relative on earth, that he knew, save Ralph Formby. There had been an uncle Jack once, after whom he had been named, the only brother his father ever had; but he had not been heard of for fifteen years. He was in Australia then, trying his fortune at the diggings, and not succeeding very well; since then, no message had ever reached England concerning him, and his brother, Robert, had long since given him up as dead. Practically therefore, Jack felt himself alone in the world and penniless. Ralph could not help him, for he had enough to do himself to make both ends meet, indeed, how he lived at all, was to Jack a mystery. Moreover, he would not like to be dependent upon Ralph in any way, if he could help it. Somehow, he hardly knew how, he

had no faith in him. He was too humble, and yet at the same time, paraded his philanthropy too much to please Jack.

"No, no!" he muttered, staring into the fire. "I must fight my way alone. But the odds are frightfully against me. I do not stand the chance even of an ordinary clodhopper, for I have never been trained to work; would that I never had been born."

Then clasping his hands tightly together, he murmured, "Oh, father, father, that it should have come to this; that you should have toiled, and struggled, and schemed to heap up a fortune for me, and that it should have ended thus. If you had but taught me self-reliance, if you had instructed me how to earn my own bread, how much better it would have been. But there, I will not complain, you did it for the best, and no lad ever had a better father than I."

Then his last conversation with Ada came back to him. "You will not fail," she had said, "if you trust in God." Would God help him, he wondered? help him to bear his grief in patience, and his lot without repining? Would God help him in his struggle with the world, and keep him from utter despair?

He had never given any thought to religion, had never cared to go to church or chapel. He had tried to be honest, and virtuous, and truthful, because in his soul he abhorred vice and falsehood. But he had never prayed since he was a child, and rarely thought of God.

But he was alone now, helpless and forsaken, without a friend in the universe, except God was his friend, and of that he was by no means sure. Ada seemed to have no doubt about the matter, but then women's faith was always

stronger in such matters than that of men, and Ada might be mistaken.

Yet all the while his heart was aching for comfort and help, and to whom could he go, but to God. It seemed easy enough, when he had not a care in the world to forget God. But all that was changed now. He was like a bird in a storm, driven to the only refuge that was near.

So at length he fell upon his knees and buried his face in his hands, and began to pray. "Oh, Lord God," he said, "I am alone in the world, sad and broken hearted. And I don't know what to do, nor which way to turn. Wilt Thou help me? My heart is heavy, wilt Thou comfort me? My way is dark, wilt Thou guide me? I want to do right and earn my bread honestly. If Thou wilt help me, I will be very thankful. Amen."

He remained on his knees some little time after the prayer was said, crying softly to himself, the first tears he had shed for the day. That little prayer had subdued him in a way he could not understand, and the hard feeling that had been in his heart all the day was now entirely gone, and when he rose from his knees there was a light upon his face that was altogether new.

"I feel better, anyhow," he said to himself with a smile, "I think God will help me, after all."

For another hour he sat quite still, watching the faces in the fire. How they came and went! Only two faces seemed to linger and look at him with kindly eyes—his father's and Ada's. The one he should see no more on earth except in dreams, the other, perhaps, was lost to him also. He had not seen her since that morning he had

met her on the fringe of the moors, and had parted with the touch of her lips warm upon his own. A brief note of condolence he carried in his pocket, in which she expressed her sympathy for him in his sorrow, and prayed that God would help him and make him strong.

Could he hope to win her now? He had been her equal in station when he had told her of his love and pleaded for a word of hope; now he was penniless, and the son of a bankrupt. He had neither home or position to offer her; both he must make ere he could dare to speak to her of love again.

Should he give up in despair? God helping him, he never would. Life was before him, and he would fight its battle as long as he had strength to lift a finger. He had heard of circumstances making men, developing their latent talents, calling into play their dormant faculties, and rousing all the manhood that was in their nature. Might it not be so in his case? Perhaps this calamity that had come upon him might prove a blessing in disguise. He had lived a worthless life hitherto, doing nothing, and caring for nothing. In this respect his wealth had been a curse to him. But all this was changed now, and he must work or starve. And if Ada saw him working and succeeding, he believed she would wait for him, and encourage him with her smile, and with helpful, hopeful words.

And out of the fire her sweet, pure face seemed to beam upon him, and in his heart the memory of her words still lingered—"If you trust in Him, I am sure you will not fail."

"No, I will not fail," he said, rising to his feet and

clenching his fists. "If there is any grit in me, now is the time to let it be seen, and if there is any faith in me, now is the time to exercise it. And surely manhood is better than money, and faith is better than fortune. Ada thinks so at least, and for her sake and my own I will play the man. And now, farewell to ease and luxury, and pampered idleness and sloth. The bugle calls to battle, and I will go forth to conquest or to death, for death is better than failure, and oblivion better than disgrace. One more night in the dear old home that has sheltered me so long, and then, and then——

"To-morrow morning I go forth like one of old, not knowing whither I go. But God will guide me if I trust in Him. And in the great, toiling city of Bodelford I shall surely find something to do. My father was respected to the last, and it cannot be that his son will be given no chance. I know his creditors must suffer loss. But nothing shall be kept back, nothing! I would rather starve than keep anything that does not belong to me. And if I fail in Bodelford, then I must try else——"

But he did not finish the sentence. A sudden knock came to the door, and on unlocking it he found himself face to face with his cousin Ralph.

"Oh, Jack," was the pleasant greeting, "I am glad to see you looking so cheerful. I am very sorry I was compelled to leave you so long alone."

"Oh, thank you," Jack answered hastily, "I have not suffered on that account let me assure you. I have packed my things and put all my little affairs in order, and am now ready to face the world, and I trust to do my duty."

"And have you settled upon any plan of action?" Ralph asked, eyeing him narrowly.

"Nothing, except this. That to-morrow morning I go to Bodelford, seeking employment. I hope to get apartments for a few shillings a week, and I trust I shall be able to get some employment that will keep me, at least, from starvation."

"I am glad you look at the matter in the sensible light you do. I know it must be awfully hard upon a fellow brought up as you have been, to have to face the world in this way. I think, however, if I were in your place I should try my fortune in one of the colonies, or in the States."

"Not yet," said Jack, quickly; "there are special reasons why I desire to remain in England, and I shall not think of the colonies until I fail here."

"As you think best, my dear fellow," said Ralph, complacently. "And now I want you to look upon me as your friend. I am older than you, and have had, I may say, to rough it all my life. So I know all the ropes, so to speak, and I may be of real service to you if you will let me. I know you have not much cared for me in the past, but let that go. I hope now you may see that, in heart and intention, at least, I am a true friend to you."

"I am sure you are very kind," said Jack, moving uneasily in his chair, "and if you can assist me in any way in earning an honest living, I shall be only too grateful."

"That's just what I can do," said Ralph, with a smile. "I know, for instance, that Brown, Toadsby, and Co., of Swindel Street, have a stool vacant in their office at the present time, and a word from me would secure you the vacant post, if that is anything in your line."

"I should be only too thankful to get it," said Jack, in tones of real emotion. "You know I have absolutely nothing now but what I earn."

"Yes, I know," said Ralph, "and no one grieves more for you than I do. Indeed, I am the only near relative you have alive, I believe, unless your Uncle Jack be living, which I do not think is very likely. So that there is no one left to take an interest in you, but me."

"Perhaps so," said Jack, dubiously. "A time like this puts one's friends to the test."

"It does, indeed, my dear fellow," said Ralph, pompously, "and after this you will know who your real friends are, and who are friends in name only."

Jack winced a little at this. Ralph was too fussy and obtrusive to be altogether pleasant, but then it was his way, and Jack felt that he could not afford to be sensitive in these times.

"I will call at your office, then, to-morrow morning," he remarked at length, "and you will perhaps go with me to Brown, Toadsby's?"

"With pleasure," said Ralph, "with pleasure! And now, good-night or I shall be too late for my train."

Jack went with him to the outer door, and locked it behind him, and then returned again to his den, and gave himself up to reflection once more.

The visit of his cousin was not an altogether satisfactory one. He had talked about grief and sympathy, and neither in look or tone had he exhibited either. On the contrary Jack had almost felt that he was secretly rejoicing at the turn affairs had taken.

"No, no," he said to himself at length, "I am wronging Ralph by cherishing such thoughts. Everyone else

has forsaken me. He alone has shown his friendship in a practical fashion, and I ought not to question his motives, and, what is more, I won't if I can help it. And now for bed and sleep, if it will come! God help me, for my heart is very sore."

CHAPTER XI.

A CHANGEFUL LOT.

Toadsby and Co. They described themselves as "Brokers and Commission Agents," and the title served as well as any other would have done; besides which it sounded well, which was no small matter. But it gave little or no idea of the business done, or of the character of the firm. In fact, all was fish that came to Brown and Toadsby's net, and no transaction was too mean if money could be made out of it.

Jack had never heard of Brown and Toadsby until his conversation with Ralph, described in the last chapter, nor was he aware until years after, that the "Co." was none other than Ralph himself. Mr. Brown was a stout, elderly gentleman, somewhat greasy in appearance and remarkably oily in manner. His eyes were small and watery, his forehead low and retreating, his hair straight and abundant. He had an uneasy, restless manner, and a habit of constantly looking about him when speaking to anyone. His voice was low and insinuating, while he

garnished his conversation with frequent passages of Scripture. It is said that he had a remarkable gift in extempore prayer, and a religious experience that was wonderfully rich and unctuous. He was great at Tea Meetings, though he was never distinguished for liberality.

Many people like to see their names figuring on subscription lists. Mr. Brown was not so vain; "Let not your left hand know what your right hand doeth," was his motto, and he lived up to it to the best of his ability. Some uncharitable people said that if Mr. Brown's left hand knew all that his right hand did, it would blush with shame. But then there are uncharitable people everywhere.

Mr. Toadsby, unlike his partner, was slim and rather tall, with a bald head, a clean-shaven face, and a pointed chin. His lips had fallen in by reason of the absence of teeth, and the habitual expression of his face was one of deep sadness. He was considerably younger than Mr. Brown, though he looked years older. He was considered a very shrewd man of business, quick, silent, and always on the alert. He had not the suave manner that Mr. Brown had, and never wasted words under any circumstances; but nothing escaped his keen grey eye, while he knew, as if by instinct, the character of the people with whom he had to deal.

Mr. Brown and Mr. Toadsby had nothing in common, except an insatiable craving after money. Brown was a Whig; Toadsby was a Tory. Brown was professedly a religious man; Toadsby spent his Sabbaths in balancing his accounts. Brown sometimes talked about his conscience; Toadsby had never been troubled by any such possession. Brown had been married four times; Toadsby

had never been married at all. Yet for all this, they agreed perfectly. Brown sometimes winced at some of Toadsby's transactions, but they generally turned out so profitable, that he hadn't the heart to complain, while, as the years passed on, his conscience became elastic enough for anything.

Jack was introduced by his cousin Ralph to Mr. Brown, who received him very graciously, not to say unctuously, and began talking in his brisk, oily manner, as though all he had to say had been carefully prepared beforehand.

"I knew your father well, Mr. Formby, and a worthy man he was. Over-reached himself, it is true, as the best men are apt to do. But, as the Apostle says, 'They that will be rich fall into a snare.' Not that your father was a grasping man by any means. No, no. But mistakes will happen. I feel very sorry for you. It must be a great trouble, I am sure. But, then 'We are born unto trouble as the sparks fly upward.' So the good book tells us, you know. However, you are young and have the world before you, as we say, and if I can give you a lift by the way, I shall only be too happy—."

"Thank you very much, I am sure," said Jack, while Mr. Brown paused to recover his breath.

"Oh, don't mention it!" Mr. Brown went on. "We are commanded to bear one another's burdens, you know, and then, in your case, you will give us quid pro quo, as we say. The salary will be small—£60 per annum—for a start, if that will suit you, Mr. Formby, say so, and the thing can be settled at once."

So it came about that Jack was installed in Brown, Toadsby's office. He was not altogether pleased with the appointment. He felt, somehow, as if his fate had been arranged for him, as though he were the subject of a conspiracy. He tried his best, however, to put away the thought as unworthy of him. Both his Cousin Ralph and Mr. Brown had been true friends to him. He was quite aware that for a start he was not worth sixty pounds a year. He knew absolutely nothing about business, and had everything to learn. Yet in spite of this, Mr. Brown, who could easily have got a much more capable man, had taken him on. And Jack tried to be thankful and did his best to do his duty.

He was determined that if hard work and attention to duty would win a position in the world, he would not fail. So he stuck to his desk from morning till night, and did to the very best of his ability everything that his employers put into his hands.

No fault could they possibly find with him. He might be slow, but he was careful and sure, and quite willing to work an hour or two overtime to make up for any deficiency in the matter of quickness.

So the days dragged slowly along and lengthened into weeks. To Jack, they seemed like years, so leaden-footed was their march. They were brightened, however, by a great purpose, and a great hope. Every day he was gaining experience, and schooling himself to business habits, and, though the future was still dark and uncertain, he was not without hope that he would be able to do what others had done before him. How it was to be accomplished, he could not see. From Brown, Toadsby's office, he could see no Jacob's ladder reaching up to the heaven of his hopes and dreams. Still a way might be there, though hidden from his sight. God might be leading him, though he could not see His hand. This much.

at least, was clear. He must do his duty and watch and wait.

He had taken very humble apartments in a poor, though respectable street. His little sitting room he called his "den," in memory of other days. Here he spent his evenings alone trying to nerve himself for the great battle that lay before him. He was wonderfully cheerful on the whole, and found his chief solace in books. Cigars and pipes he had put aside as being a much too expensive luxury with his present income; for the same reason he gave up all intoxicating drinks.

"Whatever good there may be in beer and tobacco," he said, "I don't think they will help me at the present juncture." So he resolutely put his foot down on every wasteful habit, and was surprised to find, after awhile, that he was none the worse for the sacrifice.

That he should indulge in dreams of the past now and then, is not to be wondered at, yet he never moped or spent his time in useless repining. He had never been happy in the old days except when dreaming of Ada Woodville or rambling with her on the hillsides; and though there were many little luxuries he sadly missed, on the whole he was fairly content with his lot. There was some compensation in knowing that he was doing his best, and that he was no longer eating the bread of idleness, and though he cordially disliked both Mr. Brown and Mr. Toadsby, and felt very dubious occasionally about the character of some of their transactions, yet he was preparing himself for something better should ever the opportunity offer.

So the days dragged on without change or excitement, and, but for the weekly recurring Sabbath, the monotony

would have been almost unbearable. Each Sunday morning if the weather was fine, he made straight for the country, taking his lunch in his pocket. Generally he dropped into some village church or chapel during service hour, and felt refreshed in body and mind for the rest and change, and then would start on the tramp again, working his way back to Bodelford in time for tea.

He never went near his old home. He felt he could not bear the sight of it yet. Nor did he make the least attempt to get a glimpse of Ada Woodville, though his heart was hungering with a terrible pain for a sight of her face.

Since the day of his father's death he had never seen her, and excepting her brief note of condolence no word had passed between them, yet she was in his thoughts nearly every hour of the day, and the memory of her smile, and of her kind hopeful words was a constant source of inspiration to him.

Of course she would know what he was doing, for Ralph still visited Netherby Hall, and would be sure to tell them how he was getting on. What did Ada think of him now, he wondered?

If he had been at Netherby Hall at that moment he would have got an answer to his question. For Ralph and the Netherbys were in very earnest conversation about no less a person than Jack himself.

"I think he is trying to do his best," Ralph said, "but I fear he will never make anything out. He has never been trained to business habits, and, worse still, he has acquired many expensive habits, and in a city like Bodleford, there are so many temptations placed in the way of young men, and Jack is easily persuaded."

"But I have heard he is working very hard," Dick said, "and really shaping well."

Ralph smiled superciliously before he answered, and softly stroked his dark moustache; all of which was not lost upon his auditors.

"He has to work pretty hard at Brown, Toadsby's, they are keen men of business, you know. And really, I hope he will do well, but he will have a difficulty in making both ends meet, at his present rate of living."

"I believe Mr. Formby will live within his income, whatever it may be," Ada interposed, "for I am sure he is honest as the day."

"I am sure no one doubts his honesty for a minute." Ralph said with haste. "My fear is lest the very generosity of his nature may lead him into difficulty."

"I have no fear on that score at all," Ada answered with rising colour. "He will do what is right, whatever happens, and the way he has taken up his changed lot without a murmur or a word of repining is very noble of him."

"Why, Ada, you are waxing quite eloquent," said Kate, in her usual half pleasant, half spiteful, fashion.

At which Ralph interposed quite gallantly, and said "Miss Ada is quite right; Jack has buckled to work quite nobly. And whatever may be our fears,—and they are the result of our great regard for him,—we all sincerely hope that he will succeed." And then the conversation drifted away in other channels.

It was very evident that Ralph was anxious to keep on good terms with Ada. And if he was jealous of Jack he was very careful to keep his jealousy to himself. That he wanted to win Ada's affections there could be no doubt, not as an object in itself, but as a means to an end, and that end Ada's fortune. Hence, he played his cards with great care; flattered her where he imagined flattery would please, and strongly and persistently advocated the principles which he knew were dear to her heart, while, at the same time, by cleverly veiled insinuations, he tried to throw doubt on Jack's ability, and even suggested, in an off-hand fashion, that trouble of a serious kind was in store for him, unless events took an unexpected turn. He did not say in so many words what he thought the trouble was likely to be, but from such fragments of conversation as "expensive tastes," and "present rate of income," people formed their own conclusions, and some people went so far as to shake their heads in a very dubious kind of fashion when his name was mentioned.

Fortunately, or perhaps unfortunately, we hardly know which, Jack knew nothing of this, and so went steadily on with his work, never dreaming of ill, and more and more confident each day that in the end he would win the victory.

CHAPTER XII.

BLIGHTED HOPES.

ACK had been at Brown, Toadsby's nearly three months, and was flattering himself that he was getting to be a thorough man of business, when an event transpired that shattered all his hopes and plunged him into the depths of despair. He was sitting before his desk as usual, engaged in adding up several long columns of figures, when Mr. Toadsby suddenly pushed open the door of his private office, and called in his sharp, grating voice: "Mr. Formby, will you come this way, please?" "Yes, sir," Jack answered, and instantly rose from his chair and followed the retreating figure of Mr. Toadsby.

"Kindly close the door behind you," said Mr. Toadsby, as soon as Jack had stepped over the threshold of the private office. "There, that will do; now take a seat, as I have something of importance to say to you." Jack instantly complied, much wondering what was in the wind, and half hoping that the junior partner was about to propose a rise in his salary.

For several minutes Mr. Toadsby occupied himself in carefully turning over several loose sheets of paper. But whether they were letters or receipts, Jack could not see At length, without looking up, he said, "You informed me on Monday, Mr. Formby, that Mr. Jonas Wilkins had not paid his account; is that so?"

- "Yes, sir, quite right," Jack answered.
- "Has he paid his account yet?"
- "Not to me, sir."
- "Not to you?"
- "No, sir."
- "Would you kindly explain the meaning of this receipt, then, Mr. Formby?"
- "Where did you get that from?" Jack asked with a gasp, and turning pale to the very lips.
- "The signature is yours, I presume," said Mr. Toadsby, with a smile.
- "Yes, it looks like mine certainly," said Jack, looking completely bewildered. "But I do not understand it at all."
- "Will you kindly fetch your receipt book; most likely you will have the counterfoil of this."

Instantly Jack rushed back to his own desk and in a few seconds returned with the receipt book, which he handed to Mr. Toadsby.

- "The number of the receipt I see," said Mr. Toadsby, as if speaking to himself, "is five six eight four. Hem! the counterfoil of this is missing, as I expected. As clumsy a bit of swindling as I ever met with, this. The thief is evidently new to the business."
- "I do not understand you," said Jack, flushing crimson.
 "Do you insinuate that I—that I—" he could not put the

thought into words, it was too horrible. But he stood glaring at Mr. Toadsby, like a caged tiger.

"Please calm yourself," said Mr. Toadsby, blandly.

"Evidently there is something that wants clearing up here. Now let me explain my part of the affair, then, perhaps, you will be good enough to explain yours.

"You informed me on Monday that Jonas Wilkins had

not paid his account. That is so, I believe!"

"Yes, sir."

"Very good. I took the liberty of calling on Mr. Jonas Wilkins myself this morning, in order to press for payment. And on mentioning the object of my visit, he manifested great surprise and indignation, and ended by producing this receipt for the amount. Which, on my giving him a written guarantee, he allowed to come into my possession. The receipt is from your book, and bears your signature, while the forty two pounds ten shillings have not come into our hands. Perhaps, now, Mr. Formby, you will be good enough to explain your share in the transaction."

"I tell you, Mr. Toadsby," said Jack, clenching his fists, "I have had nothing to do with the transaction, and so I have nothing to explain."

"That is all bravado," said Mr. Toadsby, with a sneer.
"You had better make a clean breast of it at once. It will be better for you in the end."

"Make a clean breast of it!" said Jack, hissing out the words between his clenched teeth. "Confess myself a rogue? Never, sir! I tell you there is some devilish bit of villainy at the bottom of this."

"Evidently there is," said Mr. Toadsby, blandly; "and, according to present appearances, you, sir, are the villain."

"Me, sir? Me?" hissed Jack, white with rage, and taking a long stride in Mr. Toadsby's direction. "Say that again, and your toothless mouth shall not utter another lie for the next six months!" And Jack shook his fist so near Mr. Toadsby's face, that the latter nearly fell back over his chair.

"You had better behave, sir," gasped Toadsby, at length.
"I do not wish to hand you over to the police, but I shall be compelled to do so if you carry on in this way. For your father's sake, and for the sake of the honourable name you bear, I do not wish to prosecute; but if you drive me to extremes, I will show no mercy."

"Mercy! you toothless scoundrel!" roared Jack. "It is not mercy I want, but justice. You know, that in spite of that receipt, which I cannot explain, but which most likely you can; you know, I say, that in spite of the receipt, I am honest. Do you think, even if I wanted to be a rogue, I should be such a contemptible fool as to adopt a measure like that? A son of Robert Formby playing the villain and the fool for a paltry forty pounds! How dare you, sir, charge me with such a thing? I tell you, sir, my good name is more to me than all the wealth of Bodelford would be. All my hopes of this life and the life to come are wrapped up in it; and do you think I should be such a despicable idiot as to fling it away in this fashion? Don't talk to me about mercy, sir! I want right and justice."

"That is what *I* want," said Mr. Toadsby, mildly. "Here are certain facts, Mr. Formby, and facts are stubborn things. Mr. Wilkins pays an account of forty pounds odd, which we do not receive. He holds a receipt for the same, with your signature. That receipt is taken from

your book, the counterfoil of which is missing. Put yourself in my place, and ask what is the conclusion to which you would come?"

"I admit," said Jack, "that, put in that bald way, the case looks bad against me. But this is a case in which a man should exercise his judgment and common sense: and I ask, is it likely that I should be guilty of folly so great."

"No, sir, it is not likely," said Mr. Toadsby; "that is, no one would have suspected you. But here are these facts, and they have to be explained in some way. How am I to explain them?"

"I don't know," said Jack, slowly. "There's some piece of villainy at the bottom of this, somewhere."

"You admit that somebody is dishonest, then?" said Mr. Toadsby.

"I'm sure of it," said Jack.

"Then who am I to suspect?" said Mr. Toadsby. "All our other clerks are old servants who have been with us many years, and whose characters are above suspicion. Am I to charge them, either of them or all of them, with dishonesty? Moreover no shadow of suspicion rests upon either of them—on the contrary all the suspicions point in another direction, and it were manifestly an unjust and a cruel thing even to suspect them, much less to charge them with dishonesty."

"And it is no less an unjust and a cruel thing to suspect me," said Jack, who felt that he was getting worsted in the argument.

"This is mere bandying words, Mr. Formby," Mr. Toadsby replied in a tone of irritation. "Every suspicion points to you, you must admit that. To you therefore I

come for an explanation. And I give you until to-morrow to get out of the difficulty. As I said before, for your father's sake, and, I may also add, for your cousin's sake, we do not intend to prosecute, but unless you can clear up the mystery by to-morrow, you must seek a situation elsewhere."

To this Jack made no reply. For a moment he stood with bent head and downcast eyes, as if undecided what to do, then suddenly turned on his heel and walked out of the office. His first thought was to call on his cousin Ralph, but he thought better of it and went instead to the office of Mr. Wilkins.

"Not at home, sir," was the answer he got to his enquiry.

"But he was at home this morning," said Jack.

"Yes, that is quite true," was the answer, "but he left about an hour ago for Paris, and will not be back for a fortnight."

Jack heard the words in silence. He felt as though everything was against him, as though heaven had no ear for his prayers, and earth no room for such as he. With a sigh he retraced his steps out into the sunshiny street. On every side people jostled him as they hurried to and fro. But he saw nothing, heard nothing. He walked on like one in a dream, neither knowing the direction he took, or caring.

He had a vague feeling in his heart that he had been cruelly wronged, that wicked people had deliberately plotted to ruin him. Yet who these people were he had not the remotest idea. As far as he knew he had not an enemy in the world. No one could possibly gain anything by his ruin, and what motive anyone could have

in trying to compass his destruction, was to him a mystery.

Who could have got hold of his receipt book? That somebody had was clear, for the counterfoil had been torn out. And then, there was his signature on the receipt, that was more perplexing still, for he felt certain that he had never put his name on a blank receipt since he had been at Brown, Toadsby's. What was the inference? Someone in the office had a key that would unlock his drawer, had used that key, had abstracted the receipt, and had forged his name. But who? Indeed, he suspected no one. As Mr. Toadsby had said, they were all old and trusted servants, and in his heart he could not believe that anyone of them would do such a wicked and dastardly thing.

Absolutely then he had no defence. Such an explanation as he had to offer would be laughed at in any court of law. He felt that he was powerless. The plot to accomplish his ruin had been so skilfully laid, that not only could he not unravel it, he could not even guess who had laid the snare. He must bear the brand of infamy in silence, as far as he could see. He must go out into the world with a blot on his fair name, and never be able to lift up his head again.

"Oh, this is a cruel fate," he moaned. "I could have borne poverty or want, but to be robbed of my character is to lose my all. Oh, that I had never been born."

The next moment a gentle hand was laid upon his arm, and looking up with a start, he encountered the fair face and sweet liquid eyes of Ada Woodville.

"Oh, Mr. Formby," she said, "you must excuse me, but I could not help coming across the street to speak to you. It seems years since I saw you last."

"Yes," he said, almost brokenly. "It seems a long time. But it will be much longer ere we meet again. Indeed, I fear this will be our last meeting on earth."

"Why, Mr. Formby, what can you mean?" she said in a tone of alarm; "and why do you look so dejected? You do not seem at all pleased to see me. Has anything happened that is likely to destroy our friendship?"

"Yes, everything has happened," he answered, slowly. "So much has happened that when you hear of it, you will loathe my name and try to forget that you ever knew me."

"No, no!" she answered quickly. "I am sure you are mistaken in that, I shall always think of you as one of the dearest friends I have ever had, and I shall be proud of you as long as I live for the manly way in which you have taken up the burden of your changed lot, and the noble patient manner you have settled down to a life of toil and poverty."

"Oh, Miss Ada," he said, with tears in his eyes, "it is just like you to talk in that kind, hopeful way. But you don't know all. Would to God we had died together in Boggart Clough."

"Oh, please don't talk in that way, Mr. Formby," she said, pleadingly. "It isn't like you at all. And I thought when I came across the street to speak, you would be very pleased to see me again."

"Pleased to see you again?" he answered, brushing his hand across his eyes; "God knows that for the last three months I have been hungering with an unutterable hunger for a sight of your face. Oh, you do not know, Miss Ada, and no words can express it, how I have longed for one of your smiles, and to hear, if only for a moment, the music

of your voice. But for thinking of you, I should have fainted under the weary burden of my daily life. And I have not been without hope either, that I should win the battle I had set myself to fight. For God knows I have tried hard, and have worked early and late that I might please my employers, and fit myself for something better in the future, if ever the chance should offer. But all that is ended now. If we had met yesterday, I should have been the happiest man on earth. But to-day your presence seems but to intensify my misery, and deepen my despair."

For a moment she looked at him, as if utterly bewildered; then in low, sad tones she said:—"So you wish me to leave you, and are sorry that I have spoken; be it so, then, Mr. Formby, I am sorry if I have offended you."

"No, no!" he said, pleadingly, "don't leave me in anger, and if you can spare me a few minutes longer, I will explain all. Are you here alone?"

"Quite alone," she answered. "Kate was prevented from coming, at the last moment."

"Then let us go into the park," he said, "for I see we are close to the gates, and we can talk there unmolested."

To this proposition she readily assented, and a few minutes later, they were seated side by side on one of the park seats, engaged in earnest conversation.

CHAPTER XIII.

HOPES AND FEARS.

by the lake some children were laughing and playing, and here and there a solitary nursemaid might be seen wheeling a perambulator; or, deep in the mysteries of some penny dreadful, was seated on one of the chairs. Jack led the way to a seat nicely shaded by a broad-leaved sycamore, but remained standing for several minutes after Ada had sat down. It was a glorious July day, warm, and even oppressive in the city; but here in the open park there was just breeze enough to keep the air from becoming stagnant. In the shadow of the trees it was simply delicious, and made one feel that it was just a joy to live.

Jack, however, was too oppressed and care-ridden to notice the sunshine or see the flowers. In the tree-clumps the birds were singing right merrily, but he did not hear them, nor did he heed the laughter of the children floating up from the lake-side. For a moment he almost forgot the presence of Ada, as the events of the morning rushed

through his memory like the recollection of a horrible dream.

At length he drew himself up like one who had nearly fallen asleep, then quietly sat down by the side of his companion. Ada quietly waited for him to speak, though she was in no hurry for him to begin. She was thinking again of their last meeting, and felt even now his warm kiss upon her lips. How much had happened since then, and what a change had come over her lover. Lover? He seemed no longer that. He was as though that last meeting had never been, or else as though a great gulf had come between them which no earthly power or skill could If he had presumed a little in memory of their last meeting, she would not have been surprised or even displeased. But neither by word or look or tone did he allude to that day. Perhaps he had given her up-had relinquished the hope he once had cherished; and she heaved a little sigh at the thought, for he was dearer to her to-day in his trouble and despondency than ever he had been before.

He spoke at length in his usual abrupt fashion. "I have something to tell you, Miss Ada; and when I have told my story we must go our ways, and God knows if ever we shall meet again."

She made no reply to this little introduction, and then he went on, as if there had been no pause, to speak of what had transpired that morning.

"You will see," he said in conclusion, "that my reputation has been taken from me, and that was my only possession. Practically, I have no defence. Whoever the rogue is, he has managed the matter so cleverly that every particle of suspicion falls on me. I am afraid that even

my best friends, when they hear of it, will pronounce me guilty, for I have nothing to offer against the charge but my simple denial, and that, I fear, in these suspicious times will count for little."

Ada felt so too, but she did not say so. She resolved if she could not encourage him, at least, she would not help to depress him.

"What I am to do" he went on "God only knows. I have tried to do my best, but I might have done my worst, for the good that has come of it."

"No, no," Ada answered quickly, "you have the satisfaction of knowing that you have done right, and a good conscience is surely worth something."

"You believe then without doubt or demur that my hands are clean!" he said excitedly.

"I do Mr. Formby" she answered, looking him frankly in the face. "I believe you are incapable of a mean or dishonest action."

"God bless you for those words," he said reverently and with the sound of tears in his voice. "I can bear a great deal, with the knowledge that you believe in me still."

"You will not fail" she said. "I am sure you will not, and this trial will but help to make you strong."

"I hope your words may come true," he said despairingly. "But the world is very dark just now. For three months I have been trying to do my best. I have lived within my little income, small as it is; and I have done no single thing that even my mother would regret, if she were living: and it does seem very hard, when one has lived purely and done his duty, to be accused of theft."

"It is very hard," she said; "but, depend upon it, all will come right in the end."

"I do not know," he said, with downcast eyes. "Better men than I am have been crushed by the weight of unkindly circumstances, and have given up in despair. Men may fight, while they have something to lose; but, when all is gone, they lose heart, and just drift with the tide. How it may be with me I do not know; I am tenacious of life and honour, and shall hold fast as long as I can. May I ask you to pray for me, and, if the worst comes to the worst, think kindly of me to the last."

"You must not talk of the worst," she said. "You will not fail if you trust in God. I shall hear you shouting victory yet."

"I wish I had your faith," he said, with a smile. "Anyhow, your words will always be a comfort to me. And now we must say 'Good-bye' again. I have detained you too long already. Whether ever we may meet again God only knows. But we may be friends still, though we meet no more;" and he turned away his head to hide the moisture that had gathered in his eyes.

"We may be friends as long as you will," she said, brokenly; and she placed her little trembling hand in his.

"We will part here," he said; "and I will go out by the other gate; here, in the sunshine, as once we parted before."

He felt her hand tremble in his as though it would be withdrawn, as he spoke these words, while a hot blush swiftly mounted to her cheeks.

"No, no," he said quickly, "you mistake-me. I know what is due from me in my changed circumstances. I will not presume on what has been, nor on what might have been."

And he dropped her hand suddenly, as though something had stung him. His last "Good-bye" she scarcely heard; and, ere she had time to reply, he had turned on his heel and walked away. She watched him eagerly, as he strode along the gravelled path, but he never once looked behind him; watched him till he turned a corner behind a clump of trees; and then, with a little sigh, she retraced her steps towards the city.

It was much later than usual when she reached Netherby Hall, but she gave no hint of what had detained her. Early in the evening she retired to her room, under the plea of a bad headache—a circumstance that was not uncommon after a day in the great noisy city of Bodelford; so that no one sought to detain her or made any remark, except to express the hope that her headache would be quite gone by morning. Once in her room, she locked the door behind her and gave way to a few quiet tears. She had spoken hopefully enough to Jack, yet in her heart she had serious fears and misgivings as to the future; and the more she thought about the matter, the more despondent she became.

To be turned adrift upon the world homeless and penniless was bad enough, but to be turned adrift with a blackened reputation was a thousand times worse, and she could not but fear that Jack would sink under the load that was laid upon him, and drift down the stream to utter ruin.

How gladly she would help him if she knew how. But she could see no way of rendering him any assistance. She knew he was very poor, yet to offer him money would only insult him, and widen the gulf perhaps that had come between them. And yet to let him drift on to destruction without a friendly hand being stretched out to save him, seemed the very extreme of cruelty.

She regretted now that she had not accepted him as her lover, for then she would have had the right to assist him, and why should he be allowed to sink down into the mire of want and poverty when she had enough for both? It seemed a strange Providence if Providence it was. Yet she had acted for the best, and tried to do what was right.

She had no doubt now that she loved him. In his poverty and distress he had touched her heart as he had never done in the old days, and if he had spoken to her of his love again that day, poor as he was and disgraced, she would have responded without reserve. He had already displayed the qualities that once he seemed to lack, and given a fair chance in the world, she had no doubt he would succeed. Hence she no longer feared to link her life to his if he would come and ask her love as he once had done.

But he would not come, she knew that very well. She had felt it all the while they had been together that day. He had evidently buried the past, or at least had tried to do so. They would meet henceforth as mere acquaintances, if they met at all. He would never presume, she was sure, upon what had passed between them. How he had misinterpreted her agitation that day, and dropped her hand as though she had stung him, while all the while her heart was hungering for a word of love.

And now he would go away and try to forget her, and imagine perhaps that her regard for him had ceased because his circumstances had changed. How little he knew of her yet if he imagined that mere social position could

influence her to that extent, or that he was less to her because he was poor instead of rich. Oh, if she might explain without being thought unmaidenly. But he would not give her the chance, and so they both must suffer in silence, and loving each other with all their hearts neither would dare to declare that love.

She rose from her chair at length, and went to the window and threw it open. It was a lovely summer night, warm and still. Far away down in the valley she could hear the ripple of the Bodel borne faintly on the breeze, and now and then the whirr of a bat's swift wing as it fluttered past her window, but with these exceptions no sound broke the stillness.

Leaning her elbow on the window-sill she gazed dreamily out into the night; overhead the stars burned brightly, but she did not see them; and around her the wind whispered softly and died away in the distance, but she did not hear. Indeed, she scarcely seemed conscious of anything; every sense became steeped in a soft dreamy languor, the weariness of the day was beginning to tell upon her, she had wearied her brain until it refused to think any more, and now tired nature was beginning to yield to the influences of the hour. How long she sat there gazing out into the night she never knew, but she started up at length in affright and stared wildly about her as a piercing scream rang out into the night and died swiftly away over the hills. It seemed to her as though she recognised the voice, and that it cried "Ada" as it went rushing past.

"It was Jack's voice," she said with blanched lips, "something has happened to him." And she listened eagerly for its repetition But no other sound broke the

silence, and closing the window, at length she crept fearfully into bed.

For hours she lay trembling and listening, now persuading herself that the cry she heard was a token, and now, chiding herself for her folly in being frightened at the cry of some night-bird.

The dawn, however, began to creep through the window at length, and then she fell into a gentle sleep, which continued far on into the forenoon. But not until the following day did she quite recover her usual spirits, and was able to put away the superstitious fancy that had so broken her rest.

CHAPTER XIV.

NEARING THE BOTTOM.

FTER leaving Ada Woodville in the park, Jack retraced his steps with all possible haste to "Brown, Toadsby's." He was in a very miserable and despairing mood. Smarting under the wrongs that he had endured, and feeling doubly sensitive in consequence, he had altogether misinterpreted the blush that had crimsoned Ada's cheek when he parted with her.

"She can never be other than kind and good," he said to himself. "But she is evidently anxious to forget the past, and wishful that I should do the same. I cannot blame her. I ought to be grateful that she recognises me at all, and allows me to regard her as a friend. But the hope of winning her, I suppose, I must give up. Perhaps I have been foolish in cherishing it so long. I must fight the battle now for its own sake. It may be it is best I should."

And with this reflection he mounted the stairs, and knocked at the door of "Brown, Toadsby's," private office.

Toadsby was out; but Mr. Brown, bland and greasy,

was quite prepared to hear anything Jack might have to say.

"Of course you know all that has transpired?" said Jack. Mr. Brown nodded and smiled.

"Do you intend to let the case come on for trial?" Jack asked.

"Well, no, Mr. Formby," Mr. Brown answered, beaming upon Jack with what he intended to be a most benevolent smile. "We wish to be merciful in the case. As it is written, you know, 'I will have mercy and not sacrifice."

"That's nothing to the point," said Jack, hotly. "It s neither mercy nor sacrifice that I want, but simple justice. As you must know, I am the victim of a wicked conspiracy, and I want to have the chance of vindicating myself."

"Precisely," said Mr. Brown, still smiling; "we wish to give you every chance. What is your defence?"

"This," Jack replied: "that though I were a rogue, it is incredible that I should be such a contemptible fool as this affair would make me out to be."

"Rogues are always fools," said Mr. Brown, sententiously: "such a defence would be worthless in a police court."

"You will not accept my denial then?" Jack asked.

"We cannot," said Mr. Brown. "The evidence against you is overwhelming."

"You don't believe it is, or you would prosecute me," Jack said, indignantly. "It's a cowardly and contemptible shift under the plea of being merciful. If I am guilty, it is your duty to prove it and punish me; but to rob me of my character in this way, and then kick me into the street is mean beyond expression."

"This is not the kind of return we expected for our kindness," said Mr. Brown, sorrowfully. "I had hoped when you returned that you were about to make a full confession. 'But because sentence against an evil work is not speedily executed,' as the Scripture says, 'therefore the hearts of men are fully set in them to do evil.' How true the Bible is——"

"Hold!" said Jack, with flashing eyes, "and let's have no more of your cant; pay me my month's wages, and I will not trouble you again."

"Pay your wages!" said Mr. Brown, rising to his feet, his face flaming with anger. "Further than this, impudence cannot go. Yes, Mr. Formby, when you return the £40 you have stolen, we will talk about wages."

In a moment Jack's lips became livid, and clenching his fists, he took a step towards Mr. Brown, as though he meant to strike him, but instantly checked himself. "I must conquer myself," was the thought that flashed through his mind, "ere I can hope to conquer circumstances;" and turning quickly on his heel, he marched out of the office.

The big clock of the Town Hall was just striking three when he stepped into the street. For a few moments he stood quite still, as if undecided what to do.

He knew that he must do something or starve. He was in debt for his last month's board and lodging, for he had been able to live only from hand to mouth, paying his landlady each month when his wages became due. Now, however, he was unable to do that, and how he was to meet the future, penniless as he was and in debt, was a problem that he could not easily solve.

'There is yet time to call on the heads of a few firms,"

he said to himself at length, drawing himself up to his full height. "If Brown and Toadsby are so anxious to show mercy, as they profess to be, they will have kept the affair to themselves; and, for my father's sake, perhaps, some one will take me in, and give me a chance of earning my bread."

And with this reflection he started off at a rapid pace, resolved not to say "die" while there was any chance of life at all.

To his sorrow, however, he discovered that Brown and Toadsby had not kept the affair to themselves. Wherever he went he found that the story of the embezzlement had preceded him. Had he been any ordinary Brown, Jones, or Robinson, most likely very little would have been heard of the matter; but the merest hint that the son of the late Robert Formby, of Philadelphia Chambers and Ryecroft, had robbed his employers to the tune of forty pounds, spread like wildfire, and before nightfall was known from one end of Bodelford to the other.

Jack returned to his lodgings in a state of mind that can be best described by the word "savage." He seemed 'n himself a very son of Ishmael, with his hand against every man's, and every man's hand against him.

"It would seem as though the world and the devil had gone into league for the purpose of crushing me," he said to himself, as he dropped wearily into his chair; "but I will not be crushed if I know it. If I must die, I will die hard; and if there is any grit in me, the world shall see it yet." And he leaped up resolutely from his chair, and went and touched the bell.

"I will have tea at once, Mrs. Pickles, if you please," he said, on his landlady appearing; "and after tea, if you

can spare me a few minutes, I should like a little conversation with you."

Jack's frugal meal soon appeared on the table and as quickly disappeared. Then summoning Mrs. Pickles, he informed her that he was without money and could not pay his bill, but that he was quite willing to let his boxes remain in pledge until such a time as he could pay her in hard cash, if she would consent to such an arrangement.

Mrs. Pickles consented, for the simple reason that she had nothing better to propose. Moreover, she had great confidence in Jack.

"He is none of yer fast young gents," she said to a neighbour of her's, only a few days before. "And what is more, he never 'as no fast young men about 'im. He's never hout late, and hasn't got no bad 'abits of no sort. An' I believe he's as honest as the daylight. I wouldn't be 'fraid to trust him with untold gold."

"I fear I shall have to leave Bodelford, Mrs. Pickles," Jack said, "and if the worst comes to the worst and I am not able to claim my boxes, why then, after a reasonable time, sell them."

"Oh, I hope, sir, there'll be no necessity for that," Mrs" Pickles answered with evident emotion.

"I hope so too," said Jack, "but nothing is certain in life, they say, but death."

"You shouldn't talk 'bout death, sir, you're quite in the bloom of youth, as one may say," Mrs. Pickles answered, regarding him curiously out of the corner of her eye.

Jack laughed a little bitterly, then answered, "Very good, Mrs. Pickles; then we'll drop the subject, and consider the matter settled."

An hour later, as Jack sat staring into the empty grate,

his cousin Ralph was announced. Jack was quite expecting him; for, since his father's death, no one had shown himself more friendly, or more desirous of rendering what help he was able, than Ralph. Indeed, Jack was beginning to think far more kindly of his cousin than he had been in the habit of doing, and to regard him as about the only friend he had in the world.

"My dear Jack," said Ralph, coming forward, with a look of deepest concern upon his face, "this is a sad business indeed. Come, tell me all about it, and command my services to any extent you please."

"Many thanks, Cousin Ralph," Jack answered, evidently touched by the other's kindness; "but I would prefer to fight my battle alone. Still, your sympathy is none the less welcome on that account."

"There seems to be some fearful blunder somewhere," said Ralph, in the same commiserating tone.

"There's some fearful villainy," said Jack, quickly, "and I'll get to the bottom of it yet."

"That's right," Ralph answered. "I am glad you are not in despair over it. But cannot you let me help you in some way?"

"I think not," was the reply. "I must go on now till I find the bottom; it surely cannot be far off, and, when that is reached, I must begin to struggle upward; or, if that is impossible, then I must accept my fate and die."

"Never say die," said Ralph; "with a good conscience and a resolute will, a man can accomplish a great deal."

"At any rate, I have the first," Jack answered, "whether I have the second or not remains to be proved."

"I believe you have both," was the reply, "and, I am

sure, you have the good wishes and sincere prayers of many friends."

"You do not doubt my honesty then?" Jack asked looking hard at his cousin.

"Doubt your honesty," Ralph answered, lifting his eyes and hands at the same time. "Do I doubt that to-morrow will come, or that the flowers will bloom again next year? No, my boy, you are a Formby and that is enough for me."

"Thank you," said Jack; "it will be easier to fight my battle knowing that I have a few friends in the world who believe in me still."

"You will always have that," returned Ralph. "But, now my boy, are you sure that you do not need help? I am only a poor man as you know. But to the utmost of my ability, I——."

"Please don't mention it," Jack answered; "I have health and strength, and a pair of strong hands, so that I do not fear of earning my bread somehow."

"Well, as you will," said Ralph, looking relieved. "But don't forget that at any time I shall be glad to render you all the assistance in my power."

"I will not forget," Jack answered; "I hope, however, by the blessing of God I shall be able to fight my owr way through the world, and I will let you know from time to time how I am getting on."

After that, the conversation dragged somewhat, for the two men had very little in common, and had never been on confidential terms with each other.

Ralph rose at length to go, yet hesitated still, as though he had something on his mind he wished to say.

"You do not go much into the neighbourhood of Ryecroit now?" he said at length, in a questioning tone.

- "I do not go at all," Jack answered. "I have never been in the neighbourhood since I came to live in Bodelford."
- "You know, of course, that Dick Netherby has purchased Ryecroft?"
 - "No, I had not heard," Jack answered.

Ralph looked relieved. "Then you do not hold much communication with your old friends?" he said.

- "I hold none," was the reply.
- "I am sure the Netherbys would be very pleased to see you if you could call on them."
- "Perhaps so," said Jack. "I suppose you visit there still."
- "Occasionally—very occasionally. But I must be going. Good-bye, my boy, and from my heart I wish you all success."

Jack stood on the door step for some time, listening to the echo of Ralph's footsteps along the street. It was a glorious summer night, warm and still. There was no moon, but a million stars were glittering in a cloudless sky.

"I think I will have a ramble down by the river," he said to himself. "I shall not sleep if I go to bed, and the stillness of the night and the soft ripple of the river will soothe me perhaps."

Saying which he turned back for his hat. "Don't wait up for me, Mrs. Pickles," he called from the passage. "I have the key with me;" and without waiting for her reply he slammed the door behind him, and sauntered forth into the night.

A quarter of an hour's brisk walk, and Bodelford was all behind him, for he lived in the outskirts of the city. In the bright starlight he could see the Bodel Valley stretching away in the direction of his old home for many a mile, and at his feet the river rolled majestically onward, with a murmur that was scarcely audible.

"This will suit my mood," he said, as he slackened his pace. "Here I shall be able to think calmly over the events of the day, and perhaps come to some definite resolve respecting the future."

CHAPTER XV.

MISGIVINGS.

BOUT a month after the events recorded in the last chapter, there was another garden party at Netherby Hall; and, of course, Ralph Formby was one of the guests. Since discovering from Jack himself that he held no communication whatever with his old acquaintances, he had been a much more frequent visitor than usual at the Hall, and his coming was always hailed with pleasure by every member of the family. He was an excellent talker, when he chose to exert himself, and always the most agreeable of guests; while his acquaintance with city doings and city gossip, which he was never tired of retailing for the benefit of his friends, rendered his visits doubly welcome.

Of course, the news of Jack's misfortune had reached the Netherbys, and had been eagerly discussed. In some measure they had, indeed, been prepared for it; for more than once Ralph had hinted about expensive tastes which his kinsman had cultivated, and even prophesied—when Ada was not about—what in his judgment was certain to come.

Yet, notwithstanding this, the Netherbys were very slow to believe that Jack had been guilty of any dishonest act. Indeed, the old squire and Dick roundly asserted, again and again, that though every jury in the land should pronounce him guilty, they would still believe in his honesty. Mrs. Netherby and Kate were not quite so certain, and the more frequent their conversations with Ralph the more dubious they became.

What Ralph himself believed it was hard to say. Usually so plain and straightforward in his statements, in this matter he seemed to contradict himself again and again. The truth is, Ralph wanted to act a double part, and he found it very difficult of execution. Not for the world would he have it imagined that he had any feeling against his cousin, or that he would be pleased to have him out of the way. Hence he posed as Jack's friend and champion. On the other hand, if, by cleverly-veiled hints or inucndoes, he could shake the faith of the Netherbys, and especially of Ada Woodville, in his cousin, his own position, he considered, would be materially strengthened thereby.

He felt it was a difficult game to play, but he had confidence in his own powers. Moreover, the prize he aimed at was such a valuable one that he was determined not to stick at scruples. He tried to persuade himself that all was fair in love as well as in war. To keep Jack out of the running was his great object, and in his heart he secretly rejoiced at the turn events had taken.

In one or two conversations with Ada, he discovered that she had still unshaken faith in Jack's integrity. The only thing she seemed to fear was, lest the force of circumstances should prove too much for him, and, losing all hope, he should drift with the stream to utter and hopeless ruin. In all this Ralph professed to be exactly of her opinion; while he posed so cleverly, and with such evident sincerity, as Jack's friend, that Ada was led on to talk with him much more freely than she would otherwise have done. Any man who was Jack's friend, and who would defend him against the abuse of the world, was sure to commend himself to her heart and affections. Hence Ralph seemed to her a very true friend, because he was Jack's friend, and because in the City, day after day (according to his own showing), he defended his character against the unjust aspersions that were hurled against it.

In those days Ralph never attempted to play the part of lover. He had sufficient penetration to see that the time was not ripe for any such avowal. But then he could afford to bide his time. Everything so far had gone splendidly in his favour, and he had no doubt that victory would crown his efforts, and at no very distant date.

"There can be no doubt she is fond of Jack still," he said to himself, as he walked slowl, along the road from Essebrig Station to Netherby Hall, on the afternoon of the garden party; "but she's bound to forget him in time. She's not seen him now for four months, and, according to Jack's own confession, she has held no communication with him, unless she has done so within the last month; and that's not likely, for nobody seems to know his whereabouts at present. At any rate, if she knows, I think, by a little manœuvreing, I shall be able to get it out of her." And with this reflection he twisted his moustache complacently, and quickened his steps at the same time.

Later in the afternoon, he—along with Dick, Ada, and Kate—was seated on a garden chair, watching a game of tennis.

"By-the-bye," said Dick, breaking a somewhat lengthened silence, "have you heard anything of late of our old friend Jack?"

"Nothing," said Ralph, sententiously; "not a whisper."

"It's strange," said Dick; "he might have dropped out of existence, so completely has he vanished."

"Then no news of him has reached Netherby Hall?" said Ralph, inquiringly, looking hard at Ada at the same time.

"If so, we should all have heard of it, I think," Ada replied; "for no one would dream of keeping it from the others."

"Yes, quite so," said Ralph, uneasily; "the truth is, I am getting a little concerned at this long silence."

"You do not think anything has happened to him, I hope?" said Ada, with rising colour, her thoughts suddenly reverting to the cry that had so startled her a month ago.

"Well, no," said Ralph, slowly twirling his moustache, "I have no reason to think any harm has befallen him. Still, as his cousin and friend, I should have felt more satisfied if he had informed me as to his whereabouts."

"When did you see him last?" Dick asked.

"Oh, it must be quite a month ago," Ralph answered slowly. "Let me see, to-day is Saturday. It will be a month ago yesterday. It was the very day he was dismissed from Brown, Toadsby's. I called at his lodgings in the evening to see how he was getting on, and to render him any assistance I might be able."

"And did he seem all right?" Kate asked with a sly glance at Ada.

"Well, he seemed depressed, as was natural," Ralph answered. "Still he had not lost hope altogether. He said he thought he had nearly got to the bottom, and he hoped soon he would begin to rise. I left him standing on the door-step, and I must say he was in much better spirits than I should have been under the same circumstances."

"He has evidently left Bodelford," said Dick reflectively.

"Well, I should judge so," Ralph answered. "For I cannot hear of anyone having seen him since late on the night in question."

"Did someone see him after you left?" Ada asked timidly, and without lifting her eyes from the ground.

"Yes, Baker, our cashier saw him," Ralph answered somewhat hesitatingly. "Baker had been out to Earnford to a party or dance, or something of the sort, and when returning about midnight, or a little later, along the banks of the Bodel, he met him strolling leisurely along the river bank, as though he were enjoying a quiet ramble."

"It seems strange that he should be down by the river alone, and at such a late hour, does it not?" Dick enquired in a somewhat anxious tone. While Ada looked up with a white scared face, and waited anxiously for the answer.

"Well, it does seem a little strange," Ralph answered after a pause. "When I left him he said nothing about going out for a ramble. Still, the night was a very beautiful one as you will perhaps remember, and it may be that after I left, he came out for a mouthful of fresh air, and extended his walk farther than he at first intended."

"Perhaps it was not Jack at all," Kate interposed, "as likely as not your cashier was mistaken."

"He says he is quite certain," Ralph replied. "Indeed, according to Baker's account, they exchanged goodnights, so that I think there is scarcely any room for doubt."

"Still that is not a matter of much consequence," said Dick, "unless he did not happen to turn up again at his lodgings, and that could be easily settled by enquiring of his landlady."

"Just so," said Ralph, "but that is just where the perplexing part of the affair comes in. It was only on Thursday morning last that I heard of Baker meeting him in the Bodel valley, and on the evening of the same day I went straight off to Pimlico Street to make enquiries of Mrs. Pickles, as to when she had last seen him."

"Well?" said Dick, eagerly; while Ada held her breath and pressed her hand tightly to her side to still her heart's loud beating.

"Well, strange to say," said Ralph, "I found the house empty. And, on making inquiries of her neighbours, I learned that Mrs. Pickles, after waiting nearly three weeks, and being unable to let her rooms, had sold her furniture to a broker, and had gone to live with a married daughter in London."

"Humph!" said Dick; "that's awkward."

"It seems from what I could gather," continued Ralph, "that this married daughter of Mrs. Pickles' had long wanted her mother to come and live with her, so that her neighbours were not at all surprised at her going."

"And haven't any of these neighbours her address?"

Dick asked.

"None of them," said Ralph. "Such people don't trouble much what becomes of their neighbours; and it seems not one of them had thought of asking Mrs. Pickles what part of London her daughter lives in."

"Well, I don't know that it matters so very much," Dick replied, after a pause. "Most likely he remained in his old lodgings till Monday morning, and then started out afresh to seek his fortune. When he has got a settled place, most likely you will be hearing from him. He has a thousand times more pluck and energy than any of us ever gave him credit for, and some of these days he will be dropping in upon us quite unexpectedly, having in the meanwhile made a fortune."

"I am sure we should all be delighted," said Ralph, looking from one to the other with an air of candour that was quite refreshing to see.

At this point Dick suggested a game of tennis, as the players whom they had been pretending to watch had just completed the set.

Ada, however, begged to be excused. She was in no humour for tennis, she said, and would much prefer to sit quietly by and watch.

"And think your thoughts and dream your dreams, eh?" whispered Kate with a laugh.

"Just that," said Ada, with rising colour.

"Oh, well, we will excuse you under the circumstances," Kate answered with a sly glance, and then tripped away to join the others.

Ada did her best to be cheerful, but the conversation that afternoon oppressed her in a way she could not understand. She was not exactly superstitious, though she came of a superstitious race, and had lived nearly all her

life amongst people who gave undoubted credence to the weird folk-lore of their county.

Yet, though not superstitious in the strict sense of that word, she was influenced in spite of herself by the tales of ghosts and omens and tokens that she had heard during the years of her childhood and youth. And try as she would she could not banish the recollection of that wild cry that had startled her so much a month ago. Putting two and two together, it seemed to her that she had abundant reason for anxiety.

On the day in question he had found himself adrift upon the world, with a blackened reputation; and in conversation with her he had confessed that he wished he had died when he came in search of her in Boggart Clough. He had also left her, evidently, with a wrong impression upon his mind as to her own feelings towards him, and had spent the rest of the day, so she had learned, in trying, though in vain, to secure a situation. He had been very much depressed during the evening, according to the testimony of Ralph, and at midnight had been seen walking alone by the Bodel river. About the same hour, while she was sitting at the open window, she had heard a scream in a voice that sounded strangely like his, and since that time no one had either seen or heard of him.

Putting all these things together, she could not help fearing that some evil had befallen him, and that she would see his face no more.

She battled against the feeling with all her might, and succeeded so far as to preserve a calm exterior. But, in spite of a placid and sometimes smiling face, she had an almost intolerable aching in her heart, and was far more disposed to cry than to laugh. Jack was more to her

than all the world besides. He had stolen her heart almost against her will. She had loved him even while she had repelled him, and admired him while she blamed him; and since his misfortunes her heart had gone out to him more completely than ever, and her admiration of him had increased a thousand fold. More welcome to her at that moment would be the sound of his voice, than earth's sweetest music; and the grasp of his hand would be as new life to her.

Would he ever come again? she wondered. Would she ever hear again the sound of his footfall, or have glad echoes awakened in her heart by the music of his voice?

She could hardly keep back the tears as these thoughts passed through her mind; and the departure of their guests she hailed with a sigh of relief.

Once within her own room she gave way to a flood of tears, and then sought consolation in the old Book, which was to her a never-failing source of comfort and of hope.

CHAPTER XVL

MEDITATIONS.

N reaching his office on the following Monday morning, Ralph was surprised to see among the letters lying on his desk, one bearing an Australian post-mark, and addressed to R. Formby, Esq., Merchant, Bodelford, England.

"Well, this is strange," he said, turning the letter from side to side. "I have no correspondents in Australia, and, if I had, they would not describe me as 'merchant.' I wonder if this letter is for Robert Formby? But, how am I to know that, without opening it? If Jack were about, the right thing to do, perhaps, would be to hand it over to him. But stop! I see a light; this letter is from Jack's long lost uncle, and namesake. He's wanting funds very likely. Had I better send it to the dead letter office, I wonder, or, shall I break the seal and read it? It's not my letter, that's certain, but Robert is dead, and Jack is lost, and nobody will blame me under the circumstances if I do read it. I am next of kin, and that ought to give me a kind of prescriptive right. Moreover,

how am I to know that the letter is not for me! That is a fair line of argument in a case of dispute. It is addressed to R. Formby. I am R. Formby, and as for the word 'merchant,' well, who knows what I am. I am itching to know the contents of the epistle, so here goes."

And the next moment the brick coloured envelope lay on the desk, and Ralph was eagerly devouring the contents of the letter.

When he had finished, he carefully folded it, and replaced it in the envelope. Then throwing himself in his easy chair, he stretched out his legs to their utmost capacity, pushed his hands deep down into his pockets, and gave a low whistle. After a while he picked up the letter again, and read it a second time, more slowly this time, and with an expression of perplexity upon his face.

He had been right in his surmise. The letter was from John Formby, and announced among other items of intelligence that he expected to reach England within a month after the receipt of his letter. It was a somewhat rambling epistle, drifting away every now and then into reminiscences of his early days, and alluding to circumstances and individuals that Ralph had no knowledge of.

"I have been going to write dozens of times," the letter said, "but kept putting it off until I had something worth writing about. For many years I had no luck at the diggings; I saw other fellows come, and after a year or two go away again, having in the meantime made their fortune, while I kept toiling on year after year, scarcely earning bread. It was very maddening, I can assure you. Still, I was not to be defeated if I knew it. As you know, Bob, the Formbys have a lot of determination when driven to it, and I wasn't going to play the coward while I could keep

on my feet. Well, would you believe it, it was not till three years ago that the tide began to turn in my favour. I was always certain that our claim had some good stuff in it, but it took an awful amount of getting at. However, I've made a bit; just sufficient to keep me out of the workhouse the rest of my days, and have left the diggings for ever.

"I find down here at Melbourne there is an awful lot of speculation going on, and fortunes are made—and lost for that matter—more rapidly than at the diggings. I have been strongly tempted more than once to have a fling, but I might lose all I have, and so, in order to get out of temptation, I have resolved to come home. I have engaged a berth in the *Etruria*, due to sail hence about a month from now. I hope I shall find you well and still prosperous. You cannot think how impatient I am to be off now that my mind is made up. However, I shall be kept busy in putting my affairs straight till the time of sailing, that is one comfort.

"Tell my young namesake that if he's good and anything like his uncle I'll give him a five pound note on his wedding day; that is if the young monkey is not already married; for let me see, he must have reached a marriageable age by this time. Dear me, how the time flies. I have his picture which you sent me fifteen years ago, and often wonder if the original of to-day is anything like it.

"I ought to say that the Etruria is expected to reach Southampton about September 15th. It will be a great joy to see you again."

Much more to the same effect the letter contained, but the foregoing is sufficient for our purpose. Kalph thought of little else during the day, and was somewhat puzzled how to act under the circumstances.

"I wonder what the old fogey means by having just enough to keep him out of the workhouse!" he said to himself. "I shouldn't be at all surprised if he hasn't made a 'pile,' as the Yankees say. At any rate, it will be policy on my part to keep on the old fool's lee-side when he does come home; and if I can keep Jack out of the way, or persuade the old sinner that his blessed nephew is a rake and a scoundrel, I may come in, as next-of-kin, for all that he has, whether little or much. I think my game now is pretty clear. Hang me! if I am not getting into luck's way! I have now two strings to my bow instead of one, and if I don't work the oracle my name's not Ralph Formby."

And he slapped his leg with an expression of great good humour, and then proceeded to make a circuit of the office.

"Hang me!" he said to himself at length, "I wish Jack was dead and out of the way—I should be easy in my mind then. I would approach Ada in the capacity of a sympathiser, and would soon wriggle myself into her affections. A house in the country, and two thousand a year are not to be sneezed at, though the house is in such an out-of-the-way hole as Cornwall, while the girl herself is a fortune to any fellow, independent of her money. Hang me! I believe I am fully two-thirds in love with her already. At any rate, she's the only girl I ever cared two straws about, and if there's a chance of winning her I'll do it. Jack is out of the way, that's one comfort; and the same power that got him out of the way can keep him out—at least, I think so.

"My difficulty is a present one. I am short of funds. These philanthropic dodges are getting worn out. It's worse than useless to appeal for funds to send blankets to the Greenlanders, or socks to the Kamschatkans, with the thermometer standing at 90° in the shade. I must start a new society—something nearer home. Let me think now."

And he lit a cigar to help him in his meditations.

"There's the temperance movement," he went on; "but, no, the field is too well occupied already. Besides. teetotalers are generally too clear-headed to be swindled. I fear there's no opening in that direction. The same may be said of the 'Free Meal' business for the street Arabs; that mine is nearly worked out. 'A Mission to Publicans' might take with a few teetotal fanatics. I'll put that down on my list, and think about it at some future time. 'A Central Association for the Purpose of Stopping the Importation of Opium into China.' No, that won't do; the title is too long, and China is too far away. I must get at something nearer home. I have it. 'The National League for the Suppression of Smoking,' that sounds well, and I know lots of old fools that have a craze on that subject. They believe that tobacco is driving the country to the dogs, and wouldn't mind giving a hundred or two to help a cause of that sort. I must get out prospectuses at once. Let me think now."

And he pulled deliberately at his cigar for some minutes in silence.

"A strong case can be made of juvenile smoking," he said, reflectively, and with a scornful curl of the lip. "What are the points now? Enfeebled brain power, impaired digestion, diminished power of will, liver

complaints, deteriorated physique, leading to morbid and evil imaginings. Yes, that's it. That will take with the women, especially with those who have growing lads. Correlative evils. That sounds large, and will go down with the ignorant. Let me see, there's bad company; thirst, leading to intemperance; idleness; extravagance. Now for the religious 'aspec' of the subjec',' as Mr. Brown says. I must draw a harrowing picture here, or it will not be a bit of use. 'More spent in tobacco than in missionaries;' that must be brought prominently forward. The thing will work, I can see." And he threw the stump of his cigar into the grate, and lit another.

For a quarter of an hour he smoked in silence, then hastily wheeled himself round to his desk, took up his pen, and began to write. Evidently, however, the sentences did not flow very freely, or else they did not look so well on paper as when he had turned them over in his mind; for he constantly tore up the sheets, and threw them into the waste-paper basket.

At length he hit upon something that seemed to please him, for he smiled complacently, and even lifted the paper from the desk, that he might have a closer look at it.

"Yes, that will do," he said, with a smile. "'Imperial Federation' doesn't sound so hackneyed as 'National League.' The country is full of national leagues, of one sort and another. I've got a fair start, anyhow, now for the committee. Well, thank Heaven, I've never any difficulty on that score. A bogus committee is the easiest thing in the world to manage, and one of the least difficult to manufacture. Let us see, thirteen or fourteen names will be quite sufficient for the committee, with your humble servant as hon. secretary.

"And now for the prospectus paper, which naturally divides itself into two parts. First, the evil itself; and, second, the means for its suppression. I must be very concise in these points. I have it. Each paragraph shall start with a word printed in small capitals, which shall be the keynote, as it were: thus, under the head 'Evils,' we can have—1. Physically; 2. Mentally; 3. Morally; 4 Commercially.

"Then, under 'Means for its Suppression,' say—
1. Legislative Enactments. 2. Public Meetings. 3. Anti-Tobacco Literature.

"That will do. I must get this in the printer's hands to-day; and to-morrow I must look out for 'Patrons' and 'Patronesses.' I think I will begin with the bishop, for he's dead on juvenile smoking, and so is his wife, for that matter. I hope the thing will take, for I'm bound to get money somehow. There's one thing, however, that I must be careful about, and that is that my clothes don't smell of tobacco-smoke while I am 'Missioning' on this question. The worst of it is, a lot of these crazy loons, who would be likely to help in an affair of this sort, have known me for years as a smoker. I wonder how I can get over that difficulty?" And Ralph scratched his head and appeared for some time to be in considerable perplexity.

"Oh, I have it!" he said at length, brightening up. "I will profess to have been recently converted on the subject: and having seen and experienced the incalculable evils arising from the use of tobacco, I am anxious to save my brethren, who are still benighted, from the curse of the deadly weed.

"That will go down beautifully. I shall pose as a

brand plucked from the burning, and if I can devise a badge to be worn (say, a small trinket, to be hung on the watchguard), and appoint myself sole agent for the United Kingdom, I shall be able to make something out of it. The thing I have in my mind can be manufactured for a penny or less, and sold for a shilling, and a matter of a few thousands can easily be disposed of.

"Oh, yes; I see money in this affair, and money I must have. I must meet this 'Uncle John' on his landing at Southampton, but not as an impecunious relative, for that would upset the frying-pan at the start. He will much more readily take me into his confidence if he thinks I am independent of his dross.

"I shall be able to explain to him easily, how his letter came into my possession, and that I considered it my duty as his only—well not surviving relative, exactly—but his only available relative, to meet him and give him welcome on his arrival, after so long an absence.

"Ralph, my boy, you are in the way of making a fortune at last. But keep your weather eye open and play cautiously. But, hullo, who comes here—"

The next moment the burly form of a policeman filled the doorway.

Ralph rose from his chair in a moment, with a look of something like consternation on his face. "Did you wish to see me?" he asked somewhat timidly.

- "You are Mr. Formby I think?" said the policeman.
- "My name is Ralph Formby," was the answer.
- "Sorry to intrude, sir," said the policeman with a nod, "but a body has just been found in the Bodel down by the weir, as is generally supposed to be a relation of yours."

"What, the body of my Cousin Jack?" said Ralph in a tone of surprise.

"I don't know his name," said the policeman, "but the son of the late Mr. Robert Formby it's supposed to be, and you are desired to come down to the Grapes Hotel to see the body for the purpose of identification."

"Dear me, this is awful," said Ralph, in tones of well-feigned concern. "I will be with you in a moment," and seizing his hat and walking-stick, he hurried out of the office, carefully locking the door behind him.

CHAPTER XVIL

TAKEN TO TASK.

ALPH was in wonderfully high spirits when he returned to his office a few hours later. Though he was not absolutely certain that the body he had seen was that of his Cousin Jack, he was morally certain as he expressed it to himself, while all the facts, as far as they could be ascertained, favoured that conclusion. On reaching his office, he took pen and paper and jotted down the main points of evidence as they occurred to him; and which assumed the following order:—

- 1. The body is that of a young man.
- 2. The body has been in the water a month at least.
- 3. Jack is the only young man known to be missing.
- 4. Jack suddenly disappeared more than a month ago.
- When last seen alive he was walking alone on the banks of the Bodel.
- 6. His circumstances were such that it is not surprising he should commit suicide.
- 7. On a slip of paper in one of his pockets the following words were written:—"This is the end of a useless life—make no inquiries. I am an orphan and friendless."

Ralph read over these points, after he had jotted them down, with great deliberation, and with a smile of much complacency.

"Yes, it is he safe enough," he said to himself, lighting a cigar, and throwing himself back in a chair. "The evidence is overwhelming, and amounts almost to demonstration. That he should say nothing to me of his intentions is not surprising. People who are meditating suicide do not always take their friends into their confidence. Moreover, in Jack's case it was most likely a sudden impulse. The sight of the dark, sluggish river, and the remembrance of his own wrongs gave birth to the desire to be free from it all. Hence the fatal plunge. Bless me, if I were a judge or a barrister, or even a coroner, I could make quite a speech on the subject."

And he chuckled softly to himself, and languidly watched the blue wreaths of smoke curling above his head.

"Bless me," he went on after a while, "things could not shape themselves more favourably than they are doing. My only rival is now out of the way. Hence—Ada shall be mine, and her money; and if that old fool who is returning from Australia has any money—why, that must be mine also. Toadsby will want a big commission, I dare say, but I can always manage him," and he took his cigar out of his mouth and began to hum:—

"'So let's be happy while we may, And smile at cark and care."

The jury found a verdict of "Found Drowned," and the body was buried on the following day at the public expense. Ralph refused to commit himself in any way. To have

the expense of a funeral thrown upon him was clearly his duty to avoid, and he avoided it.

He began to fear afterwards that he had made a mistake. If he had given the body decent burial, it would not only have raised him in the estimation of most people, but it would also have settled the question of identity. As it was, a doubt was left to simmer in the public mind, and a doubt not at all complimentary to himself.

"Either Mr. Ralph Formby does not believe his cousin is dead, or else he has acted a mean and unfeeling part," was the shape it took.

This view of the case never occurred to Ralph till the middle of the following week, when on a visit to the Netherbys. He purposely kept away until they had somewhat recovered the painful shock the newspaper reports had given them. He found Ada pale and hollow-eyed. She had tried her best to hide her grief, but it was more than she could accomplish. Night after night she had sobbed herself to sleep, and awoke again with the first glimmer of dawn, unrested and unrefreshed. It seemed to her as though she had been the cause of Jack's destruction. If she had followed the lead of her heart, instead of her opinions, all might have been different.

"And yet, and yet," she wailed to herself, "I did what I thought was right, and for the best. Oh! why did I ever come to this place? Why did we ever meet to be parted in this way? I will go back again to the old home. I ought to have gone back sooner, and I will try to forget that I ever left it, and, perhaps, in time, all that has happened here will seem like a painful dream."

She seemed more reconciled after she had come to that resolution, and on the following day began to make

preparations for her departure. No one manifested very much surprise, for it was quite understood when she came to Netherby Hall that she was to spend some portion of each year in her native county. Indeed, if any surprise was felt at all, it was that she had remained so long.

She had just completed her packing on the day that Ralph called. Though pale and hollow-eyed, as we have before intimated, she was very calm and collected, and was determined if possible not to betray any emotion. Her welcome to Ralph was more than usually cordial, a fact he noted with evident satisfaction.

"I wanted to see you very much," she said, at the very first opportunity she had of speaking with him alone.

"And I wanted no less to see you," was the gallant, though somewhat unguarded, reply.

She blushed a little, but took no further notice of his words.

"I wanted to speak with you respecting your cousin," she said in a hard, unnatural tone of voice. "You saw his body, I think?"

"I did, Miss Woodville. It has been a great blow to me, as you can well imagine"

"It has been a blow to us all," she answered evasively.
"He was such a true friend."

"A truer never breathed," said Ralph, with well-feigned emotion.

"You are quite certain that it was he?" Ada asked, after a pause, watching him narrowly at the same time.

"Well, I ought not to say quite certain," was the reply "and yet I am morally certain."

"You would not swear that it was he?" Ada asked.

- "Well, no; and yet I have not the least shadow of doubt on my own mind."
 - "You say you do not doubt it was he?"
 - "I do not doubt it for a moment."
- "And yet you allowed him to be buried as a pauper?"
 And she threw into her words such a tone of indignation that Ralph winced as though something had stung him.
- "I beg your pardon, Miss Woodville," he said, at length, in some confusion. "I think you misunderstand me. I said I was not absolutely certain, and at the inquest I said I was unable to swear that it was my cousin. Hence it would neither have been right nor seemly to have buried an unknown stranger in the family restingplace, and at my own expense."
- "Then, you think it quite possible that Jack is still alive?"
- "Well," stammered Ralph, in worse confusion than ever, "you see you place me in a somewhat difficult position by such direct questions; there is, of course, a bare possibility that Jack is still alive"
- "Oh, I am pleased to hear you say that; for, surely, if it were his body you saw, you would be certain of it," she answered quietly.
- "There you mistake me again," he answered desperately, feeling that he was being impaled on the horns of a dilemma. I feel that it would be most unfair to buoy you up, or myself either, on such a baseless hope."
- "Why baseless?" she asked. "You are not certain that your cousin is dead."
- "No, not absolutely certain; and yet, as I said before I am morally certain."
 - "Excuse me, Mr. Formby," she said, with flushing

eyes, "if I fail to understand you. You say that you are morally certain that your cousin is dead."

"Yes, that is the only word I can use that will express my meaning."

"Then, in that case, I ask, were you not morally bound to give the body decent burial?"

"That point, Miss Woodville," he continued sadly, "is one of great delicacy, and of great difficulty also. If I were absolutely certain, my duty would have been clear; but the bare possibility of making a mistake led me, in my excess of caution, perhaps, to throw my doubt into the other scale."

"Excuse me, Mr. Formby," she answered, "you said just now you had no doubt. 'Not the least shadow of a doubt,' were the words you used."

"I fear I have not spoken with sufficient clearness, or with sufficient caution," he answered humbly, "but believe me, Miss Woodville, in very difficult circumstances I have acted to the best of my judgment. At first the shock was so great, and my grief was so overwhelming, that I refused to believe that my cousin and only relative was really dead. But since then, when weighing calmly all the fragments of evidence, I am sorry that I have been able to arrive only at one conclusion, and that is, that my genial, genuine, true-hearted cousin is no more," and Ralph brushed his hand quickly across his eyes as though he would hide the too-patent evidence of his grief.

"It seems to me that you confuse the issue," Ada answered after a somewhat awkward pause. "I own that I am not skilled in dialectics, but to me the case is simply this. Either you do not believe your cousin is dead, or you have not acted according to your convictions."

Ralph looked grieved, but vouchsafed no reply.

"I hope I have not been rude," Ada went on after a pause, 'but your action in the matter had given us all a glimmer of hope, and I wanted if possible that hope strengthened and confirmed."

"You will believe I acted according to my then convictions, will you not?" he asked abruptly.

"Oh, yes; I will believe that," she answered, "for that means that up to last Thursday you did not believe that your cousin was dead."

"Just so," he answered uneasily.

"And first convictions are often safest," she said.

"It may be so," he answered slowly, glad to escape her pitiless logic by any means, though inwardly he cursed himself for allowing himself to be led into such a trap.

The arrival of Kate upon the scene at this point put an end to any further conversation, though Ada managed to whisper to him before he left that evening. "I am so glad you came to-day, for your conversation has give me quite new hope."

For a moment his face clouded, though she did not notice it, then with a bland smile, he answered. "I would do anything to give you happiness," and so departed.

No sooner was he out of the house, however, than he clenched his fists, and muttered to himself, "Curse my stupid folly. I might have seen what my penny-wise policy would have led to. And now what I am to do I no more know than Adam. Whether it is better she should believe that I am an unfeeling and an unchristian clown, or believe that Jack is still living, I am unable to determine. Either alternative is fatal to my suit."

And he strode rapidly on toward the little station at

Essebrig, though he had plenty of time to catch the train.

"Fool that I am," he hissed between his set teeth; "though I possess all the trump cards, I am in danger of losing the game. If she loses faith in me, my game is up. Hitherto she has regarded me as a kind of saint, I know. That delusion must be kept up, whatever happens. And yet, while she has a suspicion that Jack may be still alive, all my wooing will be in vain. It has ever been so. That branch of the Formby family has always succeeded, and ours has always failed. We struggle for supremacy and they beat us back. They get the honours, and we the kicks. Surely that is at an end now. But for this uncle turning up I should have been the last of the race. I must be careful, and the prize will yet be mine."

And with this reflection he entered the station, and soon after was being whirled swiftly along towards Bodelford.

CHAPTER XVIII.

IN THE OLD HOME.

N the following morning, Ada, with her maid, departed for Cornwall.

"You will soon be back again," Kate said, while helping her on with her wraps, for the morning was wet and chilly.

"I do not know," was the answer. "I may not return again till next spring."

"Stuff and nonsense," Kate answered with a laugh. "A fortnight in that dull corner of the world will completely tire you, and you will be glad enough to get back again to Netherby Hall."

"It may be so," Ada answered sadly. "You have all been so kind and good that I shall miss you very much, I know; but I have many dear friends in Cornwall also."

"I don't doubt it for a moment, darling," Kate answered in the same gay tone. "But it's such a horribly stupid place, that I'm sure you'll weary of it in a week."

"It is quiet, I admit," was the reply, "but it is not stupid; and I think it will be a great joy to visit old scenes, and look again on dear familiar faces."

"Oh, I don't doubt it for a moment," Kate said, in a tone that was scarcely serious, "but people can't live on scenes and faces."

"No," answered Ada with a smile, "but life would be very sad without them."

"Oh, yes, of course, it would be horrid to be blind," Kate answered shortly. "But here comes the carriage, so take care of yourself, and come back again as soon as possible."

"I will be back for Cousin Dick's wedding, at any rate,"
Ada answered.

"Of course you will," said Kate, kissing her, "and long before that; for the wedding will not be till the new year at the earliest. But come, hurry up, dear. Here are mother and father and Dick all waiting to say God speed and a quick return."

So, amid a shower of good wishes, and not a few tears from Mrs. Netherby, Ada departed to pay her long-delayed visit to her Cornish friends. The journey was a long and tiresome one, but the welcome she received from her old friends seemed abundant compensation.

She went at once to Trevena House—her old home—and found a suite of rooms in readiness for her reception. For the kindly vicar, who occupied the house during the rebuilding of the parsonage, loved her almost as much as though she were his own child, and had often longed, during her absence, for her return.

She couldn't help crying as she entered the little bedroom where she slept as a child. Nothing had been changed during her absence. Everything was just as she remembered it in the dear old days that had passed away for ever. Kneeling down at the foot of the bed, she hid

her face in her hands and cried softly, the tears coming as a blessed relief, and gently easing the aching that had been in her heart all the day.

After awhile she got up and went to the window, and threw it open; then dropping into a low chair, she gazed with eager, hungry eyes upon the scene, which was perhaps dearer to her than any other scene on earth.

How often she had tried to picture it to Jack Formby, when they had been walking together on Essebrig moors. Here was the old garden, still all a-bloom with flowers. skirted by the apple orchard, with the fruit ripening in the sunset; and beyond the orchard the plantation of firs. And nestled in the valley below the quiet village, with the quaint old church and tower almost hidden among the trees. And down the valley she could see the river, flashing just as it used to do, till lost in the mighty waters of the great blue ocean that gracefully curved Trevena Bay, and rippled pleasantly on its beach of yellow sand. Above the ripple of the river and the sighing of the wind, she could hear the moan and murmur of the solemn sea. breaking on the distant headland, and recoiling in long lines of foam. To-morrow she would go out again on the breezy downs, where the gorse was blooming still, and the bracken was beginning to gleam with gold.

How old memories crowded in upon her brain, as she sat there in the sunset light. In the churchyard below slept father and mother, and the only brother she ever had. There, too, slept her nurse, and many a playmate and friend.

"And I would like to sleep there also," she said softly to herself; "I think I should rest more sweetly there than anywhere else."

The entrance of her maid at this point, to help her dress for dinner, put an end to any further meditations; and a few minutes later she was in the old cosy diningroom, chatting and laughing with a number of old friends, who had been specially invited to give her welcome.

Kate's prediction did not come true. The longer she stayed, the less inclination she felt to return. For the first few weeks she found it very quiet; but, as she had predicted, it was never dull. Boating in the bay, long rambles over the downs, and visits to friends up and down the country-side, filled up the greater part of her time; while, in her spare hours, there were letters to write, sick to be visited, and sometimes business matters to be attended to in connection with her property, though her faithful old lawyer gave her as little trouble as possible in that matter.

So the weeks slipped quietly and quickly away, while the days became perceptibly shorter, and the glory and gold of autumn began to give place to the gloom and chill of coming winter.

Every week she got a letter from Kate, with a particular inquiry as to the date of her return; and every week her answer was the same, that she was quite unable to fix a date; and, indeed, from the tone of Kate's letters, there was very little to induce her to return.

"Dick was very busy," Kate said, in getting Ryecroft in readiness for his bride, "and Mr. Ralph Formby was up to the eyes in several new schemes of philanthropy. A Mr. John Formby had arrived from Australia, and had taken up his residence at Bodelford. This Mr. Formby was a bachelor, and was said to be very rich, besides which he was a very handsome man, considering his years,

and was immensely entertaining." This last piece of information Kate had repeated in several of her letters, supposing, doubtless, that it would be of interest to Ada, in which, however, she was greatly mistaken. Ada had never heard of this Mr. Formby before, and was quite indifferent respecting his wealth or appearance. The only thing that awoke any interest concerning him was a remark in one of Kate's letters to the effect that Mr. John Formby refused to believe in his nephew's death, and pooh-poohed the idea that a Formby would commit suicide.

This casual remark filled Ada's thoughts for the rest of the day, to the exclusion of everything else. Often she had debated the question with herself as to the chances of Jack being alive, and the more she had debated, the feebler her hope had become. It seemed so strange, if he were living, that he should let no one know of his whereabouts. It seemed equally strange that he should deliberately put an end to his life.

So she had tried to balance the *pros* and *cons*, but had never been able to extract much comfort from the process. The only one to whom she ever opened her heart on the subject was Madge Tregony, the vicar's daughter, and the only one that remained in the vicar's nest. All the others, he used to say, had chosen mates, and had built nests of their own.

Madge, however, was only eighteen, and quite heart whole. Moreover, she had quite determined, she said, to be an old maid, and remain at home with the old folks as long as they lived.

Her father used to smile sadly at this sage remark, but never ventured any reply. He had heard young folks talk before, and knew the worth of such observations. Nevertheless, in his heart, he hoped that it would be many a long day ere his sunny-haired and sunny-hearted girl left him, for she was the brightness of his home, and almost the light of his life.

Madge and Ada had always been friends, and their long separation had in each case made the heart grow fonder; and when Madge discovered that her friend had a secret sorrow, which it was not always possible for her to hide, her heart went out to her with even a stronger affection than before.

"I do not want to know, darling, what it is that is troubling you," she said to Ada, a few days after the receipt of the letter already referred to; "but if you can let me know of any way in which I can help, or be of comfort to you, I shall be only too thankful."

"Perhaps some day I will tell you," Ada answered; "but not just now."

"As you will, darling," Madge answered, kissing her; "but suppose we have a row in the bay, or a ramble on the beach, or a scamper over the downs."

"I should like a ramble on the beach the best," Ada answered; "for the tide will be low just now, and I like to hear the waves singing when they are a long way out."

"Waves singing, eh!" said Madge, with a laugh; "well, that is a curious fancy. I often hear them moaning and sobbing, but singing doesn't seem to be much in their line."

"Oh, yes," said Ada, cheerfully; "I heard them singing last night, as I lay awake; and the music might have come from heaven, so sweet it was and tender. It is the one kind of music that one never tires of."

An hour later, as they sat on the rocks at the foot of a serrated and storm-beaten cliff, and watched the shimmer of the sea, as the waves rolled gracefully in over the hard yellow beach, Ada said, "Madge, dear, don't you hear the waves singing now?"

"I hear them splash and ripple," Madge answered, with a laugh. "I fear I am not fanciful and imaginative, like you."

"It is just such music as a river makes rippling over a stony bed," Ada answered, after a pause. "It makes me think of the Bodel murmuring by the stepping-stones."

"The Bodel! what is that?" Madge asked, looking at her companion inquiringly.

"It's the name of a river that flows through the valley just below Uncle Netherby's house," Ada answered, "and a beautiful river it is, until it becomes fouled by other rivers flowing into it. At Bodelford it is deep and turgid——." And Ada's voice died away in a whisper, while her gaze wandered far away over the trackless sea. She did not speak again for several seconds. It was evident her thoughts were wandering back over the past, and other scenes were passing before her mental vision. Then, with a sigh, she whispered, as if to herself,

"I wonder if he were really drowned."

"Who drowned, darling?" Madge asked, anxiously.

"Jack—Jack Formby," Ada answered, quite mechanically; "a neighbour of ours, and a very dear friend."

"Was he young?" Madge asked.

"Yes; young and handsome, and brave as well; though I didn't think so once."

"Will you tell me all about him?" Madge asked; "that is, if you don't mind."

"Yes, I will tell you if you won't repeat our conversation," Ada answered.

"I will be as silent as the grave," was the reply.

Ada didn't speak again for several seconds. Then she began quite abruptly.

"His father lived in a beautiful house, and was very Jack was his only son, and was reared in indolence and luxury. Cousin Dick said he did credit to his train-Yet he had no vice save idleness, and that was scarcely his fault. He was gentle and kind and chivalrous. And so, unconsciously, I learned to love him, for he was always good to me, and once he saved my life. Yet, because he had no ambition, or so it seemed to me, and no purpose in life. I would not listen to his pleading. Well, his father died suddenly, having lost his all, and Jack was thrown adrift upon the world without a penny. and almost without a friend. And now the strength and nobleness of his character began to reveal themselves. Without a murmur he took up his changed lot, and bravely set to work, and for three months no more faithful servant And he was full of hope that he ever served a master. would be able, by perseverance and industry, to win his way in the world. But trouble came. His master charged him with theft, and he was unable to clear himself, and so was dismissed in disgrace. I saw him that day, and had a long talk with him. His cousin saw him late in the evening, and about midnight he was seen walking alone on the banks of the Bodel. Since then he has never been seen alive. But four or five weeks after a body was found in the river, and, though the face was unrecognisable, all the evidence favoured the conclusion that it was he."

"But you do not think it was he?" Madge asked, eagerly.

"I do not know what to think," Ada answered. "Sometimes I think he is living still, and at other times I think that is impossible, or he would let his friends know that he was alive."

"And had he given up all hope of winning your love when you last met?" Madge asked after a pause.

"I do not know," Ada answered sadly. "He said nothing of love to me then. He seemed to feel that we were no longer equal; for he was not only penniless, but in disgrace."

"Yet he was the same to you?" Madge asked.

"He was a thousand times more to me than ever he had been, I saw his strength and greatness then. And, had he spoken of love that day, I would gladly have shared with him all I had."

"He may be toiling on in hope somewhere, and waiting to give you a glad surprise," Madge answered.

"Yes, I think that sometimes," Ada said, with a bright smile upon her face, "for once I gave him hope that if he came back in four or five years, having redeemed himself from the reproach of indolence and sloth, that I would give him a different answer."

"How strange, if he should turn up unexpectedly some day!" Madge said, clasping her hand. "Wouldn't it be romantic? Just like you read about in novels."

"I fear that will never happen," said Ada; "but, come, love, it is time we returned, if we wish to do so on dry land; for see how swiftly the tide is coming in!" And she rose suddenly and took two or three steps in the direction of home, then stopped abruptly, while her eyes

opened wide with wonder and her colour came and went.

[&]quot;What is the matter, Ada?" Madge asked in surprise.

[&]quot;Do you see that gentleman coming to meet us across the sands?"

[&]quot;Yes. Why?"

[&]quot;That is Mr. Formby."

CHAPTER XIX.

GAINING GROUND.

DA was so astonished at seeing the well-known figure of Ralph Formby advancing swiftly towards her, that she forgot to explain to Madge that this was not the Mr. Formby of whom she had been speaking. As a consequence, the latter felt considerably puzzled at the formality of their greeting, as well as at the drift of their conversation. Not that the greeting was not cordial or the conversation animated; for Ada was truly pleased to see Ralph again, and had no end of questions to ask him relative to her friends at Netherby Hall.

Madge watched the pair with a merry light in her bright blue eyes, and indulged in sundry mental reflections, some of them not altogether flattering to their visitor.

"He's handsome and gentlemanly," was her first thought, as Ralph raised his hat and murmured his "Delighted to meet you," on Ada quietly introducing him.

Her second thought was not so flattering. "I don't like his eyes over much, and he's a good deal older than he looks."

"What a beautiful county yours is, Miss Tregony," Ralph said, turning suddenly to Madge. "I never was so charmed with a place in all my life. I came down here—shall I say it?—under strong pressure; but I wouldn't have missed it for anything. I am sure I shall come often in the future. Your sea-board especially is the perfection of loveliness."

"He's a flatterer, and I'm afraid a little bit deceitful," Madge said to herself; then answered aloud: "Yes, our county is very beautiful, at least in parts, and this we think a particularly nice corner of it."

"It's just lovely," Ralph answered, with a majestic sweep of the hand. "I don't wonder now that Miss Woodville was anxious to revisit her old home."

"I did not come solely on account of the place," Ada answered, with a smile; "for the neighbourhood of Essebrig is not without its charms. But I had many dear friends here whom I was very anxious to see."

"Oh, yes, I quite understand," Ralph answered, with a bow to Madge; while the latter reflected. "How strange he makes no reference to his strange disappearance, and how unconscious Ada seems to be of his smiles. I don't think she is much in love with him after all, and I'm very glad of it. He's not at all what she led me to expect."

A few minutes later Madge was more puzzled than ever by a lengthy explanation that Ralph entered into, as to the circumstances which led to his present visit. "I am here on deputation work," he said; "I have been addressing large meetings each night during the week at Bristol, Exeter, Plymouth, Truro, and Penzance. To-day, being Saturday, I am resting; and on Monday morning, I must be off back to business."

"I am sure you must be very tired," Ada said, sympathetically.

"I am tired," he answered, "in body at least; but, as I am not in a position to give money, I feel that I must give what time I can spare. It is the only offering I can lay on the altar, and I hope it is not unacceptable."

"I am sure it will not be that," Ada answered, impulsively. "Indeed, I think it is very noble of you to give so much of your time as you do to philanthropic objects; you keep yourself poor by your generosity."

"I will not say that," he answered. If I were rich, I might be careless, and have no disposition to work for others. Wealth, I find, is often a great enemy to Christian enterprise and zeal; so I try to be content with my lot, and do my best as opportunity serves."

"And you will get your reward," Ada answered. "I wish I could do more than I do, and shall be glad to give you a subscription for any of the good works you have on hand, if you will accept it."

It is needless to say that Ada's twenty-pound note was accepted with thanks, as was also her invitation, a little later on, coupled with that of the vicar, that he would spend Sunday with them at Trevena House; and no more congenial guest, the vicar declared, had ever been sheltered beneath his roof.

Madge was by no means so enthusiastic as her father. Of course Ada had explained to her, at the earliest opportunity, that he was not the Mr. Formby that had won her heart, and whose long silence was steadily putting out the spark of hope that had feebly flickered so long.

"But Mr. Ralph is very good and noble," she said, "he really gives more time to philanthropic objects than he can

afford, at least, the Netherbys think so; but he is such a beautiful and persuasive speaker, that his services are in constant demand at Bible Society meetings, Temperance meetings, Missionary meetings, and Conversion of Jews meetings. I have heard Uncle Netherby say he is generally reserved for the 'collection speech,' and he always makes a great impression."

"I wish we could have organised a meeting here," said Mr. Tregony, "but there really was not time; but if he ever comes this way again, I hope he will let us know beforehand." This was said over the dinner-table on the day that Ralph left, and Ada promised that she would use what influence she had in that direction.

Madge was silent and perplexed. She was by nature more suspicious than either her father or Ada, and, try as she would, she could not altogether shake off the feeling that this grand military-looking gentleman was not quite the angel that he appeared to be. Ralph had more than once caught her searching eyes fixed steadily upon him, and had felt anything but comfortable.

"She mistrusts me," was his thought; "but I don't mind, Ada is kinder than ever."

And this was quite true. So pleased was she at welcoming one of her Lancashire friends to her Cornish home, that her kindness verged almost on affection.

Ralph had managed to secure an hour's ramble with her on the beach during the Sunday afternoon, while Madge was busy teaching her class in the school, and Ada's treatment of him had been all that he could desire.

They talked freely about many things. About Dick Netherby's approaching marriage, and the chances of Jack Formby being still alive; about the return of the eccentric uncle from Australia, and the reports that were current concerning his wealth; about the success of the new "Imperial Federation for the Suppression of Smoking," and the difficulty of obtaining funds for really useful and deserving objects.

Incidentally he mentioned that he had secured the piece of land in which the body found in the Bodel had been buried, and if tidings of Jack did not reach them soon, he purposed having the body removed to the family vault in Essebrig churchyard.

"I fear it is he," Ada said, with a sigh.

"I fear so also," was the doleful response; "yet I shall hope on a month or two longer, though it seems like hoping against hope."

"At our last conversation you seemed almost certain relative to the matter," Ada said.

"Yes, that is true," he answered, "the evidence convinced my reason, and yet my heart kept hoping still."

This was said in a tone of such evident sincerity, that Ada looked up at him with a sad, beautiful smile, while Ralph chuckled softly to himself, feeling assured he had got on the right track at last. He very carefully, however, avoided playing the part of lover, rightly judging that the time for that had not yet come. In the past, he had hindered his cause by being too precipitate, and he was resolved not to make any such mistake again if he could help it.

"I know I am making headway," he said to himself as he left Trevena House, on Monday morning; "she has never been so gracious with me before, and as soon as she can get Jack completely out of her mind, I must lay siege. I think she has pretty nearly given him up now as dead—that is so much gained—and I think I need not fear any other rival. Hang me, she grows more beautiful every day, and this Cornish country-house is just charming. To be lord of an old manor like this is worth an effort. Ralph, my boy, play cautiously."

And with a self-satisfied smile he entered the little wayside station, and was soon speeding rapidly towards the north.

CHAPTER XX.

A FACE IN THE CROWD.

T was the middle of February when Ada found herself once more within the hospitable walls of Netherby Hall. She had promised her cousin Dick that she would return to take part in his marriage festivities whatever happened, and true to her word, she had dared the bitterly cold weather and the long and tedious journey, in order to be present at the ceremony. Had she merely consulted her own feelings, she would have remained in Cornwall another month at least, for she felt very little interest in the marriage. The bride was almost a total stranger to her, while many of the guests at the wedding would be people she had never seen before. Still, she was not the one to think of herself, if in any way she could help to make others happy. So she quietly pocketed her own feelings, and smilingly faced the journey and the cold, and burst at length into the drawing-room of Netherby Hall, like a gleam of sunshine, to the delight of all her friends.

"Why, Ada, how well you look," said Kate in her own

grand way, kissing her affectionately at the same time, "really, I wouldn't mind going to that odd corner of the world myself if I thought it would put such bloom on my cheeks as it has put on yours."

"You might try it, at any rate," said Ada laughing, "suppose you return with me after the wedding?"

"Mother, do you hear the child?" said Kate turning to Mrs. Netherby, "she actually talks of leaving again before she has got her wraps off."

"Oh, I am not particular to a week," Ada answered with mirthful eyes.

"Nor to many weeks, I hope," Mrs. Netherby answered.
"Really, we have been quite dull without you all the winter; so you must not talk about going back again for a long time."

"Oh, very good, aunty," Ada answered, laughing. "I am quite agreeable to change the subject and my dress also;" and she ran out of the room, followed by Kate and Mrs. Netherby.

The next few days were full of excitement and bustle; everyone had his or her hands full, and no one seemed sorry when the wedding was over, and the bride and bridegroom had started on their honeymoon.

"I think we may rest now for a week," Kate said, "and then I suppose we shall have to begin to make preparations for the home-coming at Ryecroft, and the ball, or the dance, as Dick prefers to call it."

"That will be very much pleasanter than the wedding, at any rate," said Ada.

"Do you think so?" Kate answered, looking at her slyly.

"I don't think at all," said Ada; "I'm sure of it. A

wedding means painful separations and tearful 'Goodbyes'; but a home-coming means loving welcomes and happy greetings, and joy that has no sadness in it."

"Will there be no sadness in the home-coming at Rye-

croft?" said Kate, meaningly.

"Not in the home-coming itself," said Ada. "If you mean that sad memories will gather about the place, then I agree with you."

"You have never been inside the house, have you?" Kate asked.

"I have not even been within the gates," Ada answered.

"It is a beautiful place," said Kate. "Mr. Formby built it when in the full-tide of his prosperity, and so no expense was spared; and Dick purchased it just as it stood—furniture, pictures, and everything."

"I hope he will be happy there," Ada answered reflectively.

"I see no reason why he shouldn't," said Kate. "He has plenty of money, and just enough to do to keep him out of mischief. So what more can he desire?"

"There are many people who have plenty of money, and enough to do," Ada answered; "and yet are very miserable, notwithstanding."

"Surely, you do not speak feelingly," said Kate, with a laugh. "I think you ought to be the happiest creature alive."

"I am quite as happy as I deserve to be," Ada answered; but I was not thinking of myself when I spoke."

"You are a strange creature," said Kate.

" Am I ?"

"You are indeed."

"Why "

"Oh, I don't know," Kate answered, swinging round the room. "I was never good at explaining things; but you do strike one as being so contradictory."

"So contradictory?" said Ada in surprise.

"Well, not in the ordinary sense, perhaps," Kate answered. "Only sometimes you are as full of fun as a kitten, and at others as demure as an owl. Sometimes your friends might regard you as a perfect little Puritan, and at others as quite a woman of the world. Now you laugh and frolic, and now you talk like a parson."

"What a remarkable speech," said Ada, laughing.

"Now you are going to be sarcastic," Kate answered, "so we will change the subject."

The home-coming of the bride and bridegroom was made the occasion of a very brilliant fête in Ryecroft grounds. For Dick was immensely popular in the neighbourhood with all classes, and everyone seemed intensely anxious to give him a right royal welcome. All the afternoon the bells of Essebrig church rang out a merry peal that flooded all the valley with music.

As soon as it was dark Ryecroft was illuminated from floor to ceiling. Bonfires blazed from different parts of the grounds, while rockets flared and fireworks sputtered in all directions. Dick and his wife promenaded the grounds till quite late at night, and everywhere they were received with vociferous applause, and a medley of songs, in which "Shall auld acquaintance be forgot?" and "He's a jolly good fellow" got strangely and hopelessly mixed.

Dick had given orders that there was to be no lack of refreshments for all who might care to come, and as a consequence, every village within a radius of three or four miles sent a contingent of hungry men and boys, and in some cases of women and children. While tramps and loafers on the road to and from Bodelford were glad to turn aside and get their fill of beer and cake and a glimpse of the illuminations.

As the evening wore away, the merrymakers perceptibly increased, while the laughter became more boisterous, and the shouting and singing more contagious. Everyone was in the best of humours, and if a little horse-play was occasionally indulged in, no harm was done, and on the whole the crowd was remarkably well-behaved.

In the glare of the bonfires their faces presented a curious and striking picture. Nearly all classes were represented, for the guests, who later on were to take part in the dance, freely mingled with the crowd. All ages were there, from the white-haired veteran to the fair-haired child. Women were there with infants in their arms, and fair ladies, muffled to the eyes, came out to see the fun.

Kate and Ada were constantly in and out amongst them, smiling on those whose faces they recognised, and now and then speaking to some tired-looking lad. Indeed, Ada had smiles and kind words for everyone, and never did she look more beautiful than when the firelight fell with a ruddy glow upon her cheeks, and sparkled in her clear and kindly eyes.

Around the last set-piece of the fireworks, representing the Netherby coat-of-arms, surmounted by the words "Welcome Home," all the crowd gathered. Ada and the other guests stood on a small raised platform a little to one side, and in full view of all the others. The spectacle was a very brilliant one, and, as the fiery wheels began to whirl and sputter, and the various lights shone out and faded, or slowly merged into some other colour, the enthusiasm of the people broke out afresh, and the song was raised again—"For he's a jolly good fellow."

Meanwhile Ada was intently watching the faces of the people, for they seemed to her a much more interesting spectacle than even the brilliant display of fireworks. Suddenly, and just as the enthusiasm was at its height, she started and turned deathly pale; and, but for the presence of Ralph Formby, who stood close by her side, and whose arm she eagerly clasped, she would have fallen to the ground.

"Did you slip your foot?" he said anxiously, clasping her hand in his.

"I felt a little giddy," she murmured.

"It's the whirling of the wheels," he said. "Shall I take you in?"

"No, thank you," she said, with her eyes still turned towards the crowd. "I am all right again, now. Don't trouble about me at all."

For a moment he looked at her curiously, then followed the direction of her gaze; but he did not notice what so agitated his companion.

A moment or two later she grasped his arm again, and said faintly, "Will you take me in, Mr. Formby? I don't feel at all well."

"The excitement has been too much for you," he said.
"You will be better after you have rested a bit."

"Yes; I hope so. Don't alarm anybody. Indeed, I feel better already;" and she walked firmly by his side.

In the hall she left him, and mounted the stairs without any assistance, saying, as she did so, "I shall be all right

in a few minutes. Please go back and tell the others that I was only a little giddy."

Once in her room, she plunged her face and hands into cold water, then dropped pale and panting into a large chair, and for several minutes struggled desperately with the faintness that threatened to overcome her. When able to do so, she rose from the chair and lowered the lights, then raised the blind of one of the windows and looked out.

The surging crowd was still visible, but their faces could no longer be distinguished; the fireworks were sputtering in their last gasp; and the strains of the "National Anthem" were beginning to rise—the signal for a general stampede.

Had she felt strong enough, she would have rushed out of the house and into the crowd again; but her legs were still trembling beneath her, and the faintness was not entirely gone; and resting her elbows on the window-sill, and burying her face in her hands, she moaned to herself—"What could that face mean? Was it the face of a living man or the face of the dead? Heaven help me! or I shall lose my reason."

The story she told Dick on the following day, and which he promised to keep a profound secret, was to this effect: that just as the enthusiasm was its height, and the people were shouting and clapping their hands, as though they had gone wild, her attention was attracted to a thin, pale man, poorly dressed, as far as she could see, and wearing a grey cloth cap pulled low over his forehead, who stood well forward in the crowd, but seemed to take little interest in the proceedings. He neither shouted or clapped his hands. It was this that first attracted her

attention, and looking at him more closely, she found that his eyes were fixed on her with a wistful, almost an imploring gaze. But what startled her most was the resemblance the face bore to Jack Formby. Pale the face was, haggard and deeply lined, yet she felt that she could not possibly be mistaken; and so startled was she at the discovery, that, but for Ralph Formby, whose arm she grasped, she would have fallen.

This action the stranger seemed to notice (for she never took her eyes from him), and a frown darkened his face, while he raised his cloth cap, and with his thin hands seemed to wipe the perspiration from his forehead. This gave her a better view of his face, and more fully convinced her that it was either Jack Formby or his ghost. Instinctively she reached out her hand to him, but the light faded just then, and the figure seemed to sink away through the crowd, and when the light flared up again he was gone.

"I should say the resemblance was mere fancy," Dick said, when Ada had finished her story.

"No," said Ada, stoutly, "I am not of the fanciful sort; and if it was not his ghost, it was Jack himself."

"Oh, nonsense," Dick answered; "if Jack were living, and in the neighbourhood, he would make himself known."

"I am not sure of that," said Ada. "When last seen, he was in poverty and disgrace; perhaps he has sunk in worse poverty since then."

"And in worse disgrace," interposed Dick, with a laugh.

"No, Cousin Dick; Jack Formby will never disgrace himself," Ada said, indignantly. "He may be wrongly accused, I grant you; but if you mean more than that, you wrong him."

Dick smiled as he answered, "I never believed Jack guilty, Cousin Ada; and if he is alive, he will come out of the slough on the right side, by-and-bye."

"Thank you," Ada answered; "but say nothing to any one of our conversation. Be on the look-out all the same, for I feel certain in my own mind that Jack Formby is living."

Dick smiled incredulously, but repeated his promise to say nothing about what she had said; and Ada left him, with a big hope in her heart and an unflinching purpose.

"If it is he," she said, "and he is in this neighbour-hood, I shall meet him on the hills, or on the moors, sooner or later. I know his favourite walks, and he knows mine. God grant that we may meet again, and that soon."

CHAPTER XXL

THE PATIENCE OF HOPE.

PRING came—bright, breezy, and beautiful, and gently blossomed into summer; and summer glowed and sweltered, and slowly cooled off into autumn, ere Ada said a word about returning to Cornwall. She gave no hint to anyone of what kept her. Most of the days when the weather was fine, she was out on the hills and moors, watching, hoping, and half expecting that the face she had seen in the crowd at Ryecroft would appear again, and set her doubts at rest for ever.

But though she eagerly watched and patiently waited, the face never appeared, and the hunger that gnawed at her heart remained unappeased. Yet this constant looking for Jack strengthened and intensified the old love, and more firmly enthroned him in her heart.

Now and then she was half-disposed to believe that Dick's view of the case was the correct one—that she had been impressed by a mere accidental resemblance, and that Jack, if living, was far enough away. But generally, her reason refused to entertain any such theory.

"I cannot have been mistaken," she said to herself, again and again. "It was not a mere resemblance—it was the face of Jack himself; and it is scarcely credible that two people should possess not only the same features but the same expression."

So she argued with herself, and battled with her doubts from day to day. Yet she took no one into her confidence, and outwardly appeared to have no anxiety. Jack's name was rarely ever mentioned, and when mentioned it was always in that tone and manner that indicated that his death was now regarded as an absolute certainty. As a consequence, Ada kept her doubts and fears to herself, and cherished her hopes in secret. had never been able to make a confidant of Kate, and there was no one else in whom she could confide even had she desired to do so. Mrs. Dick was a sweet, gentle little lady, that soon won the good opinion of everybody; but she was a little too shy to be easily taken into one's confidence; moreover, she was practically a stranger, and was not likely to take any deep interest in the fate of one she had never known

After their conversation on the night succeeding the ball, Dick never alluded to the subject, while Ralph carefully avoided any mention of Jack's name, deeming it wise to let his memory fade as quickly as possible, and so, with the exception of an occasional "confidential" to Madge Tregony, Ada was left in this matter entirely alone. On the whole, she was not sorry. She could indulge in her rambles, without anyone suspecting her motive, or being too inquisitive regarding her movements.

Ralph was still a regular visitor at the hall, and was, as usual, politely attentive to Ada. He was rather piqued

that he did not make more headway; indeed, on the whole, she appeared less favourably disposed towards him than when they met in Cornwall. Still he was not to be discouraged. On the contrary, he felt certain that with patience and tact he would win the day, and so played his game accordingly.

In justice to Ralph, it must be said that he was now genuinely anxious to win Ada for his wife, not simply on account of her fortune, but for herself. It was almost impossible to be much in her company without learning to love her. Not only had she a beautiful face, she had also a beautiful character. There was nothing of the "woman of the world" about her, she was so genuinely transparent in all her actions, that she carried all hearts by storm, and touched even Ralph's selfish nature in a way it had never been touched before. It was quite true that her fortune was still the chief prize and now almost more than ever to be coveted, since his kinsman from Australia had not as yet manifested any strong affection for him, or given him any hope that he would make him his heir.

Ada had met this Mr. Formby twice, and had taken quite a fancy to him. He was blunt, abrupt, and even ill-mannered, Kate said. But he was so honestly outspoken, and his voice had such a genuine ring in it, that Ada readily overlooked any apparent rudeness, and was quite disposed to be on friendly terms with him, if he would give her the opportunity.

On the occasion of their second visit, Ada had a few minutes' chat with him alone; and in those few minutes, she saw more of his real self, than ever she had done before. Unguardedly he gave her a glimpse of the kindly heart that beat beneath a rough exterior, and from that day

she felt that they were friends, though they had not met since.

"Do you believe my nephew and namesake is dead?" he said abruptly, on leaving her; and he held her hand tightly, and looked at her with his piercing grey eyes, as though he would read her very soul. But Ada did not flinch.

"No, Mr. Formby," she said, "I do not believe he is dead."

"No, more do I," he answered, then added after a pause, "I suppose he was a sad scapegrace?"

"No, he was not," she said, with a blush. "He was honourable and true."

"You believe in him?"

"I do! I have every reason to do so."

"Then we must find him, and when found, you two shall not be kept apart for lack of money; now, don't blush, for I know all about it, and I like my nephew all the better for liking you. It shows his sense. You are a good girl, I knew one just like you forty years ago, she's dead and gone to heaven; had she lived, I might have been a better man, God knows; but keep your heart up, for if the young dog is living he shall be found."

And with a hasty "Good evening," he turned on his heel and marched away.

Ada had often wished since that he would come again to Netherby Hall, or to Ryecroft; but whether it was that he felt he was not welcome, or whether he was busy prosecuting his inquiries respecting his nephew, certain it is that the summer passed away without his once showing his face.

As the autumn advanced, Ada gave up her rambles, and

began to make preparations for her return to Cornwall. Madge's letters had become very pressing, and her descriptions of the woods and downs, in all the glory of their autumn dress, made Ada all the more eager to see her old home again ere all the glories of the year had departed.

It was a great disappointment to her that nothing had been heard of Jack, and that all her watching and waiting had been in vain. But she kept a brave and hopeful heart through it all, and still held on to the belief that he was alive; and that somewhere—perhaps against fearful odds—was fighting the world single-handed, hopeful and determined still, or, perhaps, almost ready to give up in despair.

"No, if he is living, he will not give up," she would say to herself sometimes, with a smile. "He will fight till he wins. Those who think he has no energy or determination do not know him. In the struggle he will rise equal to the occasion. Determination was written on every line of that face I saw in the crowd, and that it was his face I am certain. How thankful I am that I was standing where I was at the time, for until then I had nearly given up all hope. Now I feel confident, except in my dull moments, that we shall see his face again."

She felt, however, that nothing would be gained by her remaining longer at Netherby Hall, and when once her mind was made up, she acted with promptitude and despatch.

On the evening previous to her departure, she had several callers. Among the rest was Ralph Formby, looking his best, and in his most agreeable mood; and, as Ada was in high spirits, she gave him an unusually gracious welcome, and received his little attentions with seeming pleasure.

"I ought to be kind to him," was her reflection, "for he has always been very good and considerate, and it may be a long time before I shall see him again."

Ralph was delighted, and flattered himself that his game was sure, if he would only play with caution.

"She must have nearly forgotten Jack by this time," he said to himself; "for it is more than a year ago since he disappeared, and I am sure there is no one else in the field."

"Don't be surprised if I drop in upon you some fine afternoon, Miss Ada," he said, playfully. "I quite expect I shall have to run into Cornwall again within the next few months."

"We shall be delighted to see you, Mr. Formby," she answered, looking up at him with a frank pleased smile. "And, by-the-bye, I had nearly forgotten to tell you that Mr. Tregony is very anxious that you should address a meeting at Trevena if you can find time."

"I am afraid there might be some difficulty in that," he said with a serious look. "You see, all the meetings are arranged beforehand by the local secretary. However, I will name it to him, and if he thinks it worth while to have a meeting at Trevena I shall be delighted."

"And you will make our house your home during your visit?"

"If that is an invitation I accept it most gratefully."

"It is an invitation," she said. "Indeed, we should be very much disappointed at the bare suggestion of your going anywhere else."

"It is very kind of you, I am sure," he said stroking his moustache, "and please tell Mr. Tregony that I will do all in my power to get a meeting."

"Oh, thank you," she said, "I am sure he will be

pleased;" and then the conversation drifted away to other topics.

Two days later Ada was in her old home again with the music of the sea in her ears, and the breath of autumn flowers filling every room.

"I've been very happy while I have been away, Madge," she said with a smile;" "that is, as happy as one can expect to be in this world, but after all there's no place like home."

CHAPTER XXII

GAINING EXPERIENCE.

T is now time that we returned to the hero of this story, for none of our readers will have imagined for a moment that Jack Formby was dead, or even that serious misfortune had befallen him. In truth he had—single-handed and alone—been fighting the world during all these months of silence, and displaying in a marked degree the stuff of which he was made.

After his midnight ramble on the banks of the Bodel, to which allusion has been made, he came back to his lodgings nerved and strengthened for the conflict that lay before him. He had tried during that long and lonely walk to look all the issues fairly in the face, to gauge his own strength and to calculate the chances of success, and instead of giving up in despair, he returned to his lodgings with a lighter heart than he had known for many a day.

"I fancy I'm a strange contradiction," he said to himself, "but there is something positively inspiring in the thought of fighting fate and fortune single-handed with the hope of winning the victory. No favour from anyone

henceforth, no assistance from relative or friend, no adventitious aid of any kind; nothing but the strength of my own heart and arm, coupled with the inspiration of a strong, pure love, and an honest purpose. God help me, and I'll be a man."

He spent the next day in "straightening his affairs," as he termed it. A few trinkets he had kept by him for the sake of old times he converted into money. One change of raiment he packed into a carpet bag, and leaving the rest to pay for his lodgings, he felt he was ready for the start. The following day being Sunday, he took a long ramble into the country, as was his usual custom when the weather was fine, and got back again in time for the evening service.

"I've been to no place of worship to-day," he said, after he had finished his frugal tea; "I think I'll drop into the little chapel in the next street;" and, suiting the action to the word, he donned his hat, and sauntered forth.

The service was a very simple one; for that reason, perhaps, it suited his mood. The preacher was a young layman, and evidently new to his work; yet there was one sentence in the sermon Jack never forgot, and which made the service to him one of the most profitable he ever attended. The sentence was not the preacher's own, but was a quotation from the public utterances of some great man who had recently died, and was as follows:—

"The best thing that can happen to most men is to be thrown overboard, and compelled to sink or swim for themselves. In all my experience I have never known a man to be drowned that was worth the saving."

'That's me," Jack said to himself; "I'm thrown over-

board, heaven knows, and, if I'm drowned, it is because I'm not worth the saving. Well, we shall see: I'll not be drowned, if I know it. So now for the long swim."

He heard no more of the sermon: that one sentence stuck to him like a burr, and rang its changes in the chamber of his memory through all the evening, and mingled with his dreams in the silence of the night.

Early next morning he started for Liverpool. "I shall sink if I stay in Bodelford," he said to himself; "that's a dead certainty. In Liverpool I shall be lost, and take my chance in the crowd. I may be able to keep afloat—at least, I shall try."

He had no idea what he should do, or even attempt, when he got there. He was prepared to undertake anything in reason that might turn up. He was prepared to begin at the very bottom. His position had all the novelty and charm of an experiment. He was going to prove for himself whether a man without means or friends had any chance in the world, or any hope of making an honest living.

He discovered, a few weeks later, when his money was all spent, that it was not simply means and friends that he lacked, but ability. For every situation there were a hundred applicants, and every one of them far better fitted for the post than he.

He had heard a great deal about unskilled labour, but somehow none of it seemed to come in his way. Down at the docks he saw hundreds of men at work, loading and unloading vessels; but their labour appeared to him anything but unskilled. Everywhere men were busy—sailors, plumbers, joiners, masons, bricklayers, roadmakers, teamsters, all absorbed in their own occupations,

and all working after a fashion that proved that they were trained men, and had prepared themselves for their various offices by long years of practice.

"It seems to me that I can do nothing," he said to himself, after tramping from place to place, and trying in vain to earn an honest penny. "I might take a clerkship, but a hundred better men are in before me, and what else is there open to me? I cannot serve behind a counter, or even repair the streets. I cannot sweep a chimney, or build a wall, or roof a house, or whiten a ceiling. I couldn't even drive a cab or an omnibus, though I know something about horses."

"Surely there must be something wrong in our education," he reflected. "A Jewish lad I have been told was always taught a trade, whether he belonged to the rich or poor. Surely, the old Jews were wiser in their day and generation than we are. If I had only learned a trade instead of learning Greek and Latin, how much better it would have been for me. Now I starve in the midst of plenty, and remain idle when I would gladly work, just because I never learnt to do anything, and now, there is nothing that I can do."

Jack's courage began slowly to ooze away, when absolute want stared him in the face. It had been a great trial to him to come down to a threepenny bed at a model lodging-house; but a greater trial still, when even that shelter was denied him. From three meals a day, he had been reduced to two, and from two to one, and now he found himself without even the means of getting that.

He had honestly tried his best, but so far he had failed; he was willing to do anything, however menial, so long as it was honest, but there was no room for him; evidently he was not wanted. He had never begged yet, and he felt that he would rather die than ask alms of anyone.

In some of the low lodging-houses where he had found a night's shelter, he had been compelled to mix with thieves and vagabonds, had listened to their conversation, and had been an unwilling witness of some of their impudent and infamous tricks. He had seen them empty their pockets upon the table, stretch out their (supposed) deformed and withered limbs, remove the lumps from between their shoulders, and boast that there was "no more paying perfeshun goin' than the hartful dodger."

But their ill-gotten gains had never been any temptation to him. "If I can't live honestly I will die," was his constant reflection; and as there seemed no chance of the former, death began to loom before him as the one and only alternative.

To make matters worse, the weather became all at once rainy and cold. To sleep in the open air when the nights were warm was bearable, but to shiver under a railway bridge with a biting wind whistling through, was scarcely less terrible than death itself.

"I never thought I should come to this," Jack said to himself one chilly night, as drenched with rain and almost famished, he crept into an empty cask down by the docks. His carpet bag and change of raiment had all been pawned and the money spent in food, and this day he had not earned a penny, nor tasted food since morning.

"I fear my philosophy is failing me," he said to himself. "It's all very well to talk about a tide in the affairs of all men.' If it's true in my case, it is an ebb tide. I've been fancying every day for the last month, that I had

reached the bottom, and every day I've found a lower deep. One thing, however, is certain, I'm nearer the bottom than when I left Bodelford."

The shelter was a very poor one; still it was better than being out in the rain and wind, and he tried to make the best of it. He could hear the splashing rain, as he lay coiled up, in the darkness, mingling with the sighing of the wind, and the beating of the waves against the river wall. But there was no message of hope in any sound that fell upon his ear. It seemed to him that he was utterly forsaken of both God and man. All the day, and for many a day, he had tried to keep a brave heart, and put a bold face on the matter; but hope had nearly failed him now, and the tears came unbidden to his eyes and rolled silently down his cheeks. He tried to pray, but somehow the words would not come to his lips tonight; he had prayed so often, and had received no answer, that he had nearly lost all faith in prayer. He could only lie still and listen to the surging wind and beating rain, and wonder what the end would be.

Sometimes, in moments of fitful slumber, he fancied himself back again in Ryecroft, and the surging waters of the rising tide was the singing of the Bodel river, and the splashing rain and rushing wind became the music of Summer breezes in the tall trees about his home, and for a little while, happy smiles would play about his pinched and pallid lips; then, with a start, he would reach out his hand in the darkness, and the tears would begin to fall again.

As the hour of midnight drew near the wind rose almost to a gale, and the cold became unbearable. Jack shuddered as the biting gusts went sweeping past, and tried to crouch farther back in the cask; but he was almost too weak to move, and with every effort his head swam, and consciousness threatened to leave him altogether.

"I wonder what Ada would think if she saw me now," he said to himself. "I wonder if she ever thinks of me, or if she has forgotten me altogether. No! I do not think she can forget me quite. She loved me once; I am sure she did. She let me kiss her without rebuke, and told me that I might live in hope. She will think of me sometimes, though she will never know my fate. It is best that she should not know, for the knowledge would give her pain. Oh! Ada, my love! my life! perhaps we shall meet in a better world than this." And the poor fellow gave way to a great burst of weeping, while the sobs shook his very heart. In the midst of these sad reflections a heavy footstep startled him, and the next moment the glaring light of a bull's-eye lantern was flashed upon him, while a stern voice bawled out,

"So you're 'ere, are you? come clear hout at once and 'ook it, or I'll run you in!"

"I'm doing no harm," said Jack feebly, "and I've no place else to go to."

"No place else, eh? We'll soon see about that if yer don't clear hout."

"You might let me stay," said Jack. "I can't tramp the streets on a night like this; besides, I've no strength left."

"You're an old one, evidently," said the policeman, with a coarse laugh; "but come, dry up an' clear hout at once."

"I wish you'd let me stay," Jack replied, in a feeble



the glaring light of a bull's-eye.—p. 192



voice. "I cannot be doing any harm here, and if you have a spark of human feeling, you will not deprive me of this poor shelter on such a night as this."

"Don't talk to me about feelin'," said the policeman.
"I know my duty, an' I'm a-goin' to do it. Will yer come hout?"

"The fact is, I'm too weak to try," was the answer. "I really have no strength left."

"Any road, you'll rue it," said the policeman, and he blew his whistle, and in a few moments was joined by a brother officer.

There was no more parleying after that. Jack felt himself suddenly and rudely dragged out of his shelter, and with a burly form on either side, was marched—almost carried—to the police-station.

At one time he would have shuddered at the bare idea of such a place, but he had suffered so much of late that a prison cell had no longer any terror for him. On the contrary, he welcomed its grateful warmth and shelter, and stretched himself on the wooden couch with a sigh of relief, and was soon locked in the arms of kindly sleep.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"GENTLEMAN JACK."

Was when he stood before the magistrates on the following Monday morning, nothing could hide from them the fact that he was a gentleman.

In a very few words the chief of police charged him under the "Vagrancy Act" with sleeping out of doors, and with loitering about in a suspicious manner without having any visible means of subsistence.

To two of these counts Jack pleaded "guilty," but denied that there had ever been anything suspicious in his actions.

His few and well chosen words evidently impressed the magistrates, and he was requested to defend or explain his conduct.

"In truth," said Jack, "I have no defence. It is quite true I was discovered in an empty cask, and that I have no means of subsistence. If this be a crime, gentlemen, I am guilty, and must suffer the penalty. If it be a crime to suffer hunger, to be famished for a crust of bread; if

it be a crime to be repulsed at every attempt you make to earn an honest penny, and to wander through the streets friendless and alone, then, gentlemen, I am a criminal, and have nothing further to say."

"But how came you to be in this plight?" asked one of the magistrates. "You are evidently an educated man, and it certainly looks suspicious to see you in this condition, to say the least."

"Perhaps that is so," said Jack; "and yet were I to explain, the chances are you would not credit my story."

"But what is your story ?" asked the presiding magistrate.

"Just this. That my father was accounted rich. Indeed, he was rich, as you would know, were I to tell you his name. But through heavy speculations in 'futures,' he lost all he had, and died a bankrupt in April last. I was left absolutely penniless, and having no trade in my fingers, I have tried in vain to earn a respectable living I came to your city partly to hide myself from those who knew me in my prosperity.

"I have honestly tried to get a living; hitherto I have failed.

"For the last three weeks I have had to content myself with one meal a day, and frequently I have had to sleep out of doors or tramp the streets all the night. I am willing to work, to do any drudgery if I may but earn my bread. If I cannot find work I must starve and die," and Jack pushed his fingers through his curling locks—an old habit of his—then quietly folded his arms and waited the result.

After a very brief consultation, the case was dismissed;

and Jack was requested to call at a certain office at three o'clock that afternoon, when he would probably hear of something to his advantage.

The upshot of this adventure was that Jack was offered the position of stable-boy by one of the 'bus proprietors of the city, and without any delay entered upon his duties.

Twelve shillings a week for a start could not be considered a princely income, especially when he had to work twelve hours a day. Still, it was enough to keep him from starving, while it had in it the promise of something better for the future if he could only patiently bide his time.

Hence Jack entered upon his work with a light heart, determined that he would do his best, and hopeful that there would be no more ebb in the tide of his fortune, and that henceforth there would be an unceasing flow. The work proved quite as congenial as he had anticipated.

He was fond of horses, and in the old days had rather prided himself on being a good groom. And now that his living, and even his hope of the future, depended upon the manner in which he discharged his duty, he threw himself into his work with a will, and gave abundant satisfaction to all concerned.

He soon became a general favourite with his mates, who nicknamed him "Gentleman Jack," and who treated him with the respect they considered due to his superior position and education.

He was always very reticent about the past, taking no one into his confidence, and giving no hint of having known better days. But the story he had told before the magistrates could not be kept a secret, and in a very short time there was not an *employé* of the "Liver 'Bus Company" that did not know something of his story, and was quite prepared to believe that this pleasant athletic groom was the son of some earl or duke, if not an actual prince in disguise.

Jack had no idea that he was the object of so much interest or so frequently the subject of conversation. He threw all his energies into his work, and made it his chief concern to mind his own business, and not to meddle with other people's. Hence very little of the gossip came to his ears, and very few of his mates had the courage to question him respecting his past life.

When anyone did so he gained but little by his inquisitiveness, for the subject was too sacred to Jack to be made the gossip of stable-boys. Yet notwithstanding his reticence, he always met their questions so pleasantly that they were never offended. So "Gentleman Jack" remained a mystery; an object of pleasurable curiosity but always a comrade in whom the others could implicitly trust.

At the end of two months one of the conductors having fallen ill, Jack was promoted, pro tem, to that position, with a salary of eighteen shillings a week; this was such a marked advance, that he felt quite rich and was able to purchase a few things that he had long stood in need of, besides laying aside a shilling or two every week against a rainy day.

But the work was less congenial to his taste than was that of stable-boy.

The eternal rattle and jostle of the 'bus up and down

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the same streets, ten or a dozen times a day, and seven days a week, became irksome and monotonous in the extreme.

Other people might have half-holidays now and then, and a day of rest once a week, but for drivers and conductors there was no such privilege.

From Monday morning to Monday morning, every day was alike; except that they did not start quite so early on the Sunday. Religious people going or returning from their places of worship, snarled at him if he was a little late, or if he failed to stop at the right crossing. expected to see every old woman that frantically waved her gingham at a street corner, and every dainty miss that held up her gloved hand in the crowd. He must have consideration for every one; must be polite and respectful, whatever his annoyance; but no one seemed to have any respect for him. He had neither a heart to feel, or a soul to be saved. He required neither Sabbath or Sanctuary; horses, driver and conductor were placed on the same level, except that the horses were a little less hardly worked than they, and sometimes better housed and fed. Religious people prayed for the heathen abroad, and prated piously about the sacredness of the Christian Sabbath, and kept landlords and barmaids at home to supply them with their Sunday beer, and demanded drivers and conductors to be on the route to take them to and from their devotions.

Jack grew utterly sick of the work after a few weeks, yet he made no complaint and gave no cause for any. He had his living to get, and so likes and dislikes were not to be considered. He reflected that he was no worse off than thousands of others, indeed, there were thousands who

would gladly have exchanged places with him. The work might be a little more tedious to him than to some others, because he had had a different upbringing; for that reason he must stick more resolutely to his duty until he had become thoroughly inured to the life.

Christmas came and went, but for him there was no angel's song or message of hope. No Christmas card or love token of any kind. He was quite alone in the world, and, for all he knew, forgotten. He heard groups of children singing in the streets, "Christ was born in Bethlehem."

But the song awoke no thrill of joy in his heart. It seemed as if it were not for such as he that the Saviour came. And when from numberless sanctuaries there floated out on Christmas morn the well known hymn:—

"Christians awake! salute the happy morn Whereon the Saviour of mankind was born,"

it did not seem that the call was to him. He felt as though he were a heathen in a Christian land, an outcast from the Father's home. For four long months he had never crossed the threshold of church or chapel, and no one treated him as though he had a soul.

How long he might have remained an employé of the "Liver'Bus Company" it is impossible to say, had not an accident soon after Christmas liberated him from his bondage.

The 'bus was at a standstill, and he was standing on his little round perch holding tightly the leathern strap by which he steadied himself when the vehicle was in motion. Along a narrow street a corpulent old lady was hurrying with all possible speed, and for whom all without and within the 'bus were impatiently waiting, when the horses gave a sudden start, snapping in twain the strap Jack was holding, and precipitating him head-foremost into the street.

He was picked up insensible, and taken at once to the hospital, where it was found that, besides slight concussion of the brain, he had sustained a fracture of the collarbone.

Nothing serious, however, was apprehended from the first, and in the doctor's view, nothing serious came of it. To Jack, however, it was a very serious matter. He was detained a prisoner so long that when at length he was pronounced convalescent, he found Sykes, the conductor, whose place he had taken, filling his old position again. So that the only alternative for him was to go back to the stables again at the old wage of twelve shillings a week.

Jack hesitated to do this, and for some little time debated whether he should not leave Liverpool altogether. While in the hospital he had abundant leisure to read the newspapers, and had been very much interested in an account of the construction of a new railway somewhere in Yorkshire, about thirty miles beyond Bodelford, as far as he could make out.

The more he thought of this the more pleasing the prospect became. Winter was now fairly over, and spring was always a gladsome season in the country. Moreover, he thought he would pick up his strength more quickly in the country than in the close atmosphere of a great smoky city like Liverpool.

He had sufficient money to pay his fare to Bodelford with a few shillings to spare, the remaining distance he could easily tramp, and as the way lay through Essebrig, he might, without being discovered, catch a glimpse of one dear face that was more to him than all the world besides.

All things considered, he resolved to risk it. Tying up all his worldly possessions in a blue pocket-handkerchief, he marched off to Lime Street Station, and purchased a ticket to Bodelford.

CHAPTER XXIV.

FAMILIAR SCENES.

"CAN reach Essebrig an hour before dark," was Jack's thought on alighting at Bodelford, "and nothing can be gained by my wasting my time here. I want to see no one in Bodelford, and no one wants to see me;" and, shouldering his bundle and pulling the peak of his cap over his eyes, he marched away.

It seemed a little strange to be walking through the streets that had been familiar to him since childhood, in working-man's attire. Not more than twelve months ago, he had driven with his father through the same streets behind a splendid pair of bays, and had been the envy of many a busy man of business and overworked clerk; now he was as poor as the poorest artizan that trudged wearily to his toil, and far less happy than most of them.

Every now and then a familiar face loomed into sight, and passed close to his side, but there was no glance of recognition in any eye. Even Mr. Toadsby passed him without bestowing a second glance.

"I must have greatly changed," he said sadly to himself, "or else these clothes are a complete disguise. Well, well; it's best it should be so. It would be very awkward to be recognised, and not a little humiliating; for so far I have failed, and failed very conspicuously."

He was not sorry when he had left the City behind, and found himself in the comparative quiet and seclusion of the Bodel Valley.

There was a good footpath along the bank of the river for several miles; and though the high road to Essebrig was more direct, the footpath was much the pleasanter route, and for that reason he adopted it.

His progress was by no means rapid, for as yet he was only weak, and he began to feel tired much sooner than he had expected.

He resolutely tramped on, however, buoyed up with the hope that he would catch a glimpse of Ada Woodville's face before he slept.

About noon he rested for half an hour by the wayside, and ate a hearty meal of bread and cheese that he had provided himself with before he started; then proceeded on the tramp again.

After awhile the scene began to grow more and more familiar, and he forgot his weariness as old memories began to crowd in upon his brain.

A turn in the valley at length revealed the fringe of Essebrig moors, and for a moment he paused, thinking he saw a moving figure far up the hillside, and jumping at once to the conclusion that it must be Ada Woodville. Fancy, however, had cheated him this time, and, with a sigh, he tramped on again. Now another turn in the road, and Ryecroft stands revealed, more beautiful in his eyes than ever.

He could hardly keep back the tears as he stopped to have a good look at it, nestling so grandly among the trees.

"How true it is," he muttered to himself, "that we never properly value things until we lose them. How little I valued my mercies when I had scarely a wish ungratified, and how discontented I was in the midst of plenty. Perhaps God is punishing me now for my base ingratitude, and if it be so, I must try to bear my punishment like a man, and not whine like a whipped schoolboy."

A moment later, and the bells of Essebrig Church clashed out a merry peal, that floated triumphantly down the valley, and seemed to fill all the air with shouts of gladness.

"I wonder what's up," he said to himself, as he dropped his bundle and leaned over a stile to listen to the wild jubilant music. "But here comes a schoolboy, he'll know very likely," and Jack waited patiently till the lad came up.

"What are the bells ringing for, my lad? Do you know?" Jack questioned, as the lad drew near.

"Oh, aye," was the answer. "Th' young squire is a-coming whoam to-day."

"The young squire?" said Jack, in a questioning tone.

"Aye, young Squire Netherby. He's been an' got wed, don't yer know?" the boy answered, with wide open eyes.

- "No, I did'nt know," Jack answered.
- "Oh, ye're a stranger, are ye," said the boy, evidently pleased at the opportunity of shewing off his acquaintance with local affairs. "Well, then I'd better tell ye that Maister Dick is the only son of th' owd squire as lives at the hall. He's got wed to a very rich lady in London or somewheres. That were a month ago or so. Howsomever, they are a-comin' whoam to-day, and there's to be a fine jollification to-night at Ryecroft."
- "At Ryecroft?" said Dick, in some little surprise, which, however, was more feigned than real, as now that he had the opportunity, he was anxious to get hold of all the news possible.
- "Aye," said the boy in glee; "they're goin' to 'ave fire-works, an' berloons, an' wittels as much as foaks can stuff."
- "But how is it," asked Jack, "that all these grand doings are not to be at the Hall?"
- "Oh! the young squire's left th' Hall now. He's bought Ryecroft, an' is a-goin' to live there for good."
 - "Indeed!" said Jack.
- "Aye! and Ryecroft is a mighty gran' place, too. Mr. Formby an' his son used to live there. He were a terrible rich man I've heerd, but he lost all his brass of a sudden—an' then he took ill an' died, an' his son was left without nothin' to live upon; so he drownded hissel' in the river down at Bodelford."
 - "Drowned himself, eh?"
- "Aye! I thought everybody know'd that. He got inter trouble, though nobody believed he were to blame; an' as he had nothin' to do, an' no friends, he took it very much to heart, an' so put a end to hisself."

"That was very sad."

"Foaks say as he would a-made a man o' hissel' if he had lived, for he took to work real well, an' without no grumbling, though he were nowt but a loafing idle kind o' a chap when he were at whoam; but he started real well when the screw was put on. He were always a kind, good-natured feller, but without no go till he were driven inter a corner; then he turned real plucky. Howsomever, he were accused of someat as nobody believes was true, an' that were too much for him. He just kick'd the bucket right off, an' that were the hend of him."

"Well, nobody missed him very much, I expect?" Jack said reflectively.

"Werry likely not," said the boy, after a pause; "though they do say as how Miss Woodville, the squire's niece, fretted a good deal an' were terrible cut up for awhile. But she's got over it now, I reckon, for foaks say as how she's a-goin' to marry Mr. Ralph Formby, who is a relation to the Mr. Formby as drownded hisself."

"Do people say that?" Jack asked quickly.

"Oh aye, everybody's expectin' another weddin' after a bit, an' Mr. Ralph is wonderful good to the poor, so foaks say, though he ain't a rich man he gives a lot away, an' keeps hisself poor, he's that good-natured. But Miss Woodville, you should see her, she's a beauty," and the boy rolled up his eyes, as much as to say that words altogether failed him.

"I should like to see her very much," Jack said, anxious to continue the conversation.

"Then go to the jollification to-night," said the boy

quickly, "everyone's goin', for the grounds is to be thrown open to the public, an' Miss Woodville is sartin to be there."

"I think I'll drop in if I can afford the time," Jack said.

"I would if I were you," returned the boy, "but I must be off home an' leave my slate, for I wouldn't miss the fun for anything," and without any more words he started off at a run, and was soon out of sight.

"Humph," said Jack, as soon as he found himself alone. "So Jack Formby is dead, is he? Committed suicide, and the girl he loved is going to marry his cousin. Nice state of affairs, certainly. It would be funny if I were to make myself known, and upset all their little plans."

And he pulled off his cap and ran his fingers through his hair, as though better to debate the question.

"No, no," he went on, "I have no right to interfere or speak to her until I have redeemed my character from reproach and made a position in the world. Still, I will not hide myself, and when she sees me to-night she will know that the story about my having drowned myself is a fabrication, and if she ever loved me, she will wait a few years at least. Yet I have no real hope that I shall ever be in a position to win her, and it is foolish of me to think of her at all."

As soon as it was dusk he entered the grounds of Ryecroft, and hid himself in the crowd.

He saw Dick Netherby and his wife, and almost envied him his happiness. He saw the old squire looking as hale as ever, with Mrs. Netherby leaning on his arm. He saw Kate, still proud and stately, and by her side he saw Ada, looking as sweet as an angel from heaven.

His heart gave a great bound when she first appeared upon the scene, and his first impulse was to rush out and greet her. But the feeling was only momentary; a sense of shame seemed suddenly to come over him, and he shrank back among the crowd to be out of sight as much as possible.

All unconscious of his presence, she went in and out amongst Dick's humble guests, scattering smiles and kind words on every hand, and as Jack gazed after her with wistful hungry eyes, he felt more keenly than ever the greatness of his loss. Never had she seemed so beautiful in his eyes, never had her goodness been more conspicuous.

"I was never worthy of her," he reflected. "She was never meant for such as me. I can only worship her at a distance, and perhaps the less I see of her the better for my peace."

He was quite unable to tear himself away from the place, however, while she was in sight. Like a dark shadow, he dogged her steps, and eagerly treasured up every smile she gave, though none of them were for him. Sometimes he almost felt angry with her that she looked so happy.

"If she believes me dead she has soon forgotten me," he said to himself; "but that is the way of the world, so I ought not to complain; and if she is going to marry Ralph, she ought to look happy," and he clenched his fists savagely, and turned to leave the place.

But the fascination of her presence held him fast, and

he could not feel angry for more than a moment, however much he tried.

"She has a right to marry Ralph, if she loves him," he reflected; "and if she does not love him, nothing I know will induce her to marry him. Anyhow it is only right that I should let her know that I am still living."

And he followed the crowd to see the last display of fireworks.

"Now is my opportunity," he said to himself, "so I will get to the front. Ah! there is Ralph, looking sleek and triumphant, and she is by his side. If they have any eyes at all they are bound to see me here. Ah! she looks this way. Now be cool, Jack Formby, and don't make a fool of yourself. How intently she scans every face. Is she searching for someone, I wonder? Now our eves meet. Does she recognise me? Yes; she starts and turns pale. Now she clutches his arm. Is she afraid that I am coming to her? See! she nestles closer to him, but for me she has no smile, and scarcely a look of recognition. Evidently I am not wanted. Farewell. then!" and he lifted his cap and stood for a moment with head uncovered, then quietly slunk away through the crowd, and in a few moments had passed through the lodge gates and was on the tramp again.

It had been his intention to spend the night in Essebrig, but he altered his plan and tramped on to the next village, four miles away.

He had seen the face he loved, but he had derived no satisfaction. Ada Woodville seemed more completely lost to him than ever she did. He had told himself for months past that it was foolish to hope, and yet he kept hoping, notwithstanding.

"Now," he said, "I shall hope no more. The dream is over and I am awake at last. For the future Duty shall be my bride, and heaven shall be my hope and my reward."

CHAPTER XXV.

A NEW DEPARTURE.

ACK discovered that the new railway was farther away from Essebrig than he had thought, but the remaining distance could easily be covered in a day. Indeed, from Furston, where he spent the night, he believed he would be able to reach the scene of operations by sundown, and for that purpose he started as soon as it was dawn.

About noon he reached the village of Doveleigh, and sat down to rest near a large mill that was in course of erection.

"On the look-out for a job, mate?" asked a workingman, passing close to where he sat.

"Aye; anything to be got hereabouts?"

"Likely as not; one of our fellows fell off a ladder this morning, and broke his leg."

"Was he a bricklayer!"

"No, only a tenter."

"I could manage that," Jack said. "Is the gaffer anywhere about?"

"Aye, he's yonder, with a billycock hat."

"Thanks, I'll go to him"; and, suiting the action to the word, he marched straight up to the foreman and asked in the simple phraseology of working-men, if he could give him a job.

"Are you new to these parts?" was the question that greeted him.

"I am," said Jack. "I was going on to Fernbeck Dale, to see if I could get a job at the new railway works, but hearing that one of your hands had met with an accident, I thought I would ask to be taken on in his place."

"Are you used to this kind of work!"

"No, I am not; but, I presume, I soon should get used to it."

"If I were to take you a week on approval, would that suit you?"

"Yes, quite well."

"Agreed, then. You can start at once, if you like."

To say that Jack took kindly to the hod would scarcely be true. Still, "twenty-four shillings per week was not to be sneezed at," as one of his mates said; and, as he had to work or starve, he was glad to take the first position that offered itself.

For the first few days he felt as though every part of his body had been bruised by heavy blows, but he soon got over it; and when once in the full swing of his work, he found it quite easy, and, in some respects, pleasant.

He remained at Doveleigh three months, by which time the mill was completed; and when he left, he was healthier and heavier than he had ever been before in his life. Besides which, he had several pounds in his pocket, and very good hopes of increasing his store. At Fernbeck Dale he had no difficulty in getting work. One glance at his face showed that he was no besotted navvy, but a working man of the highest type—clean, well-knit, and intelligent.

He discovered that the chief contractor had sub-let the work to a number of other smaller men, each one of whom was anxious to make as much as possible out of his contract; and, for this purpose, kept his eye well on his "hands."

Eager to waste no time, Jack applied to the first of these sub-contractors that appeared on the scene, and was taken on at once. He regretted afterwards that he had been so precipitate, for he found himself in a "cutting" with a gang of men of the real navvy type—low-brow'd, heavy-jaw'd, besotted men, who could not speak ten words without an oath, and whose highest conception of happiness was to have unlimited opportunities of fuddling, and who spoke of being drunk as the acme of all delight.

Jack held little converse with them, however. His business was to do his work to the satisfaction of his employers, and to this he bent all his energies. His comrades soon discovered that he was not one of their class, and began to persecute him in consequence. Not in very violent fashion, it is true; but they hurled coarse sneers at him at every opportunity, nicknamed him "The Duke," taunted him with being pious, and said he was too stingy to afford himself a glass of beer or a pipe.

All this Jack bore in very good humour, for he saw that, in case of a quarrel, he would get the worst of it. The gang held together in everything, and regarded him as an interloper, if not a spy, and determined, before Jack had been with them a week, that they would have their revenge when pay-night came.

Most of the men lived in wooden huts that had been provided by the contractors, for the district was very sparsely populated. A few farmhouses and workmen's cottages were scattered here and there on the hill sides, but the nearest village was three miles away.

Jack had no liking for the wooden huts, or for the company found in them, so he secured cheap lodgings in a cottage about a mile away, and enjoyed the quiet walk to and fro, morning and evening. This was another source of grievance to his mates, who taunted him with his upstart ways, and wanted to know whether he considered he was better than they were.

"I have never considered the matter at all," Jack said; but surely, in a matter of this sort, I am at liberty to do as I like."

"Don't know 'bout that," was the surly answer. "A man should live among his mates, an' be like the rest on 'em."

"But there are others, besides me, who lodge away from their work," Jack said.

"Aye, gangers and gaffers, an' that ruck," was the reply, "but you're not a ganger."

"No, but I'm a man," said Jack, with spirit, "and I claim the rights of a man."

"You do, eh!"

"Yes, I do."

"Then let me tell yer ye're a bit too big for yer jacket, an' ye'll be let down a peg before ye're much older."

"I've done no wrong to anyone," Jack replied, "and

while I treat others civilly, I shall expect to be so treated myself."

"Oh, aye! ye're too mighty civil by haaf. If ye were a bit more of a devil nobody 'ud complain."

"I'm quite devil enough for my own comfort," Jack replied, with a laugh.

"But not for ours," the man said, with a growl.

"That remains to be proved," Jack said, with a smile, and walked away.

Pay-night came once a fortnight, and on leaving the office, after he had received his first wages, Jack was met by several of his mates, who informed him that, according to the usual custom, he would have to "pay his footing."

"Pay my footing ?" said Jack, in surprise. "What is that?"

"Every new hand has to pay his footing on his first draw," was the answer.

"And what is the footing?" Jack asked.

"A gallon of gin," they replied.

"A gallon of moonshine," said Jack, with a laugh.

"But we all go shares, every man in the camp," they said.

"Well, let me tell you that I shall purchase no gallon of gin," said Jack.

"You will not?"

"No; I object on principle to any such demand, and I particularly object to bringing strong drink into this camp if it can be kept out. I don't drink myself, and it would be better for everyone of you if you drank less."

"That's our business," they said.

"But you want to make it my business," Jack answered.

"We expect you to pay your footing," they replied.

- "And I object to do so."
- "Do you know what the penalty is ?"
- "No; and I don't care much."
- "You know Nick Whiffle?"
- "Yes; what of that?"
- "Nothing; except that you will have to fight him."
- "I shall fight no one," Jack replied.

"We shall see about that," was the answer; and in a moment Jack found himself knocked off his legs, and in a moment more four men had got hold of him, one at each arm and leg, and were bearing him swiftly towards the tamp.

A crowd had already assembled in anticipation of the sport, for it was quite expected that Jack would object to pay his footing, and Nick Whiffle, the bully of the camp, was in readiness for the encounter.

The great fear was that "when it came to the pinch," as they expressed it, Jack would back out, for much as they loved the drink, they would far rather see a good stand-up fight.

In several encounters that had already taken place, Nick Whiffle had won an easy victory, and was unanimously voted in consequence the "Champion Bruiser."

Whiffle was an overgrown and somewhat loosely-built fellow, standing six feet one inch in his stockings. Like most big men, he was an easy-tempered individual, by no means quarrelsome in his nature, unless in drink or excited by a crowd, but, when thoroughly roused, was described as "a very devil."

A stand-up fight he regarded as rare fun, and was always pleased to punish any "greenhorn" or new-comer that

refused to conform to the usages of the camp. He had heard of "the Duke" several times, but had not yet seen him. Hence, when Jack suddenly confronted him he started back, expecting to find a very different kind of man.

He saw in a moment that this handsome and supple youth was no navvy born. There was something in his clear-cut features, and in the steady light of his kindly eye, that stamped him as belonging to a different set.

"So yer want to fight, Mr. Duke, do yer?" he said, glaring uneasily at Jack.

"No, I do not," was the reply, "I wish rather to live at peace with every one in the camp; but I do not choose to be trampled upon."

"You'd better pay yer footing," said Whiffle; "it ud be a pity to spoil yer purty mug, as I be sartin to do at the first round."

"I must take my chance of that," Jack answered a little bit defiantly, for the manner in which he had been waylaid and hustled back to the camp, had put him upon his mettle, and he felt in a more thoroughly fighting humour than he had done for many a year.

Moreover, he did not feel at all frightened at Whiffle.

A giant in stature he might be, and for aught he knew, a giant in strength; but he was neither quick nor supple, and Jack felt that science was a match for strength any day, and that what he lacked in size he might make up in skill.

"Very good!" said the giant, slowly, "If ye're determined to fight, come on."

And with that, the crowd drew back in a circle, and

a rope was stretched between two stakes, in less time than it takes to describe it.

"Look here mates," said Jack, making a last appeal, "I consider this treatment anything but honourable; I have no grudge against Whiffle, or he against me, that I am aware of."

"Oh, he's beginning to show the white feather," cried two or three in the crowd, in mocking tones.

"No, mates," he said, "I do not think I am a coward; but I do pride myself on being an Englishman, and I love fair play. I object on principle to give my money to make this camp more drunken than it is at present. You know as well as I do, that drink is your curse, and you know very well that you can do without it. I am not a pledged abstainer, but when I found that I could not afford to drink, I gave it up, and when I made the further discovery that I was better without than with it, I resolved to continue to do without it. If any of you were sick, or in need, I would gladly share with you my last crust, but no man, and no number of men, shall bully me into doing what is against my conscience."

"Well done, Duke," several shouted, "that's plucky!"

"But I tell you plainly," he went on, "I do not want to fight, and I shall strike no man first, but if any man strikes me I shall defend myself."

"That's it," they shouted; "pat him on the nose, Whiffle, an' draw the claret, an' then we'll see what the cove is made of."

But Jack kept too far away from the rope for Whiffle to touch him, seeing which several men suddenly pushed him forward, and Whiffle made a lurch with his long arm; but Jack was ready for the attack, and parried his blow quite easily.

A second thrust, and a third succeeded no better, while his mates chaffed him on the shortness of his arm, and slyly hinted that at last he had met his match.

This only angered Whiffle, who began to strike out right and left in the most reckless fashion.

Jack's game was an altogether defensive one, and in this he succeeded admirably.

Try as he would, Whiffle could not touch him, and getting thoroughly angry, at length, he dealt Jack a blow under the belt. This was too much for our hero. His blood rose to boiling point in a moment, and ere Whiffle was aware, Jack had dealt him a tremendous blow between the eyes. For a second he was thoroughly staggered; but on recovering himself, he made a rush for his opponent, and tried to collar him.

But shouts of "Fair play" checked him in this move, and he began again to deal out his blows in all directions.

Jack's defensive game now proved of great advantage to him. He had conserved his strength, while Whiffle had exhausted his, and so, while he was able to parry Whiffle's blows without difficulty, his superior skill and training enabled him to plant, at the same time, a regular succession of stinging blows straight in his opponent's face.

Whiffle continued to strike out as long as he could see, and tried to take every mean advantage possible. But skill and science were more than a match for his ungainly strength, and he walked away, at length, between two of his comrades, thoroughly cowed and beaten.

Meanwhile, Jack had become utterly reckless and

defiant, and wanted to know if there was any other man in the camp that wished to bully him. "If so," he said, "I am just in the humour for the fray, and if not, let me live amongst you, henceforth, in peace."

No man was forthcoming, however, and from that day "The Duke" was voted the champion, and was allowed to go his own way unmolested.

CHAPTER XXVL

THE FIRST RUNG.

ICK WHIFFLE was not the man to bear a grudge, and on the Monday following his encounter with Jack, he came to him during the dinner hour, and held out his hand.

"Look you 'ere, Mr. Duke," he said; "I ain't no feelin' agin you, nary a bit. You licked me in fair fight, an' I respect yer. You are the fust man in these parts that ever done it, an' you done it without no brag nor boastin'. An' I like yer. We can be friends, I take it; an atween us we can lick the camp. I can lick every other man, an' you can lick me. From this day I'm yer friend, an' if yer want 'elp of any kind, ax Nick Whiffle, an' he's yer man."

"It's very kind of you, I am sure," said Jack, hardly knowing what reply to make to Nick's long speech.

"I know yer not quite the same cut as me," Nick went on, "but ye're the neatest, grittiest chap as I ever comed across; an' I tell yer again, if yer ever wants 'elp, I'm yer man." "I'll not forget your promise," said Jack, "and what is more: if ever you need assistance, and I can help you, don't fail to let me know."

"Agreed," said Nick. "You'll not always be a navvy. It's curious how you ever got to be one, for anybody with haaf a eye can see that you've 'ad a heddication. I seed you were none o' our set the moment I clapped eyes on yer. But you'll rise, as sure as eggs is eggs. A chap as does his work like you do, clean, an' no skulkin', an' with a heddication to back 'im, is bound to rise."

"My experience tells me that it is much easier to sink than to rise," said Jack, with a laugh.

"There now, I know'd it," said Nick, with a broad grin. "I know'd you'd been so'thin' differ'nt; but don't you be down-hearted, mate."

"Oh! I'm not the least down-hearted," said Jack.
"I'm healthy and strong, with plenty to eat and drink, plenty of hard work, and very few cares."

"Were it the drink, now, that toppled yer over?" asked Nick, in a confidential tone. "I've knowed several gents in my time as it took off their legs in that way."

"Oh, no! drink never harmed me that I am aware of," said Jack. "I simply gave it up in the first instance when I found I could no longer afford it; and I've not taken to it again because I'm better without it."

"Well, that were sensible," said Nick, rubbing his chin. "I wish I 'ad as much sense. It are quite true what yer said 'bout it bein' the curse o' our camp. It are the curse o' every gang of navvies as I've ever know'd. But lor, I've never know'd a chap as could hit as 'ard on water afore."

"You don't know how much harder you would be able

to hit if you drank nothing but water," Jack said, laughing.

But Nick shook his head dubiously; and then, with a slow and measured step, walked away to his work. He did not soon forget his conversation with Jack, however, and before the next pay-day came round, he had formed a resolution to do without drink for a month, by way of experiment.

Jack was soon one of the best-known men in the camp, as well as the most talked about. Everybody felt that there was some kind of mystery hanging over him. His fustian clothes could not hide the fact that he was a gentleman. His speech and manners were in direct contrast with that of every other navvy in the camp. What the mystery was, however, that shrouded his life they could not penetrate.

He was one of the most genial of comrades, always ready to lend a helping hand or do a kindly deed; but respecting himself and his past life he preserved an unbroken silence.

It is true, there were not wanting those who hinted at some undiscovered crime of which he was guilty, but those who knew him most intimately, scorned the idea. His fearless glance, his honest, kindly eye, his genial smile, and ready courage gave the lie to every base suspicion or insinuation.

The most generally received idea was that, through some love affair, he had been disinherited by his father, and sent out into the world to shift for himself.

"He's a plucky dog, anyhow," was the general verdict of his mates, and they admired him accordingly.

That he should soon attract the attention of his em-

ployer is not to be wondered at. He was always at his post, always cheerful, and whatever his work might be, he did it well. Whoever might fail, Jack was always to be relied upon; whoever might be late, he was always in time.

What this cost him, no one knew but himself. He was not naturally industrious, while his training had been of the worst possible kind; but a great and lofty purpose sustained him, and a pure love, that he tried in vain to crush out, gave him inspiration in spite of himself.

While lolling in the lap of luxury, he knew of nothing that he wanted; and though he was discontented and ill at ease, he did not know from what his discontent arose.

But all this was changed now. The touch of a strong, pure love had first aroused his slumbering energies, and since then the demands of a stern necessity had spurred him on. To be a man in the truest sense was now his highest ambition. As life's meaning and life's responsibility began to dawn upon him, he felt that he wanted to do something, and do something worthy.

He knew that he had touched the bottom when an outcast in Liverpool. Since then he had been gradually gaining ground; and when at length his master made him ganger over the set he worked with, he felt that he had got his foot upon the first rung of the ladder, and that, by the help and blessing of God, he need not look back again.

To the credit of his mates, it should be said none of them were envious of his promotion.

They knew that he was worthy, and had well-earned the distinction.

While they had been often drunk he was always sober,

and while they had frequently neglected their work, he was always at the post of duty, and they had sufficient of the instincts of Englishmen to feel that his promotion was but an act of justice.

It is true the distinction of ganger was neither great nor striking. He was still one of them, and worked day by day at their side. Yet he was in a position of some authority and of responsibility also, while he had a rise in wages of ten shillings a week.

Jack bore his honours with great meekness and with proper dignity. His mates had long looked up to him as their superior. They did so still, only now with a little more show of reason.

It was very flattering to Jack to find that the men were so thoroughly at one with him, and that he had so completely earned their respect and confidence, especially when he remembered that up to the time of his encounter with Nick Whiffles he had been regarded as an interloper and a spy, and had been subjected to numberless petty annoyances. But his pluck, and courage, and skill that day had completely turned the tide in his favour; and, to-day, there was no more popular man in the camp than he.

The chief contractor, Sir Francis Lashton (he had been recently knighted) did not often appear upon the scene, but his son Tom, a young fellow of about Jack's age, drove over from Bradfield two or three times a week on an average.

He was a shrewd, yet apparently easy-going, young fellow, with a careless and seemingly indifferent air, but, in reality, with a keen eye for everything that was taking place.

He had been greatly interested in Jack from the first, and had watched him narrowly, though without appearing to notice him, and, the more he saw of our hero, the better he was pleased with him.

The story of Jack's encounter with Whiffle had greatly amused him, and he always regretted, he said, that he had not been there to see the performance.

Up to the time, however, of Jack being made a ganger he had never spoken to him, though he had long wanted an opportunity of doing so. But a few days after the occurrence referred to, Jack met him full tilt just at the entrance of the "cutting," and, touching his cap politely, was passing on, when young Lashton stopped him.

"Excuse me," he said, with some little hesitation, "your name is Robinson, I think?"

Jack nodded assent, but made no further reply.

"You have recently been made ganger, have you not?" he said, in the same hesitating tone.

"Yes, I have had that honour thrust upon me," Jack said, with a smile.

"I hope you will not think me inquisitive or impertinent," Lashton went on, "but, to tell you the truth, I have been greatly interested in you for a long time past—ever since, in fact, you gave that Whiffle a drubbing. I wish I had been there and seen you do it."

"It would scarcely have repaid you for the loss of time," said Jack, colouring. "The truth is, there was very little in the affair. I was forced into it against my will. But there was no skill on Whiffle's side, and not much I fear, on mine. He has length and strength, but

he is clumsy and somewhat slow, and so you see I had the advantage."

"I presume by that, you have had some training in the use of the gloves?" said Lashton.

"A little," said Jack. "The fact is, most young men now-a-days know a little of the arts of boxing and fencing."

"Just so," said Lashton. "And I should judge you have had a good education?"

"Well, 'good' is a relative term," Jack answered, a little evasively. "Compared with most young men in my position, the word might be properly used."

Lashton laughed.

"Come now, Robinson," he said at length, "that will not do. You are simply evading my question."

"Well, then, I will answer straight and truthfully," Jack said, with a smile. "I have not had a good education—or, rather, I am not well educated. I might have been had I been more diligent."

"Why, I should have thought you hadn't a lazy inch in you."

"Necessity is a stern master," Jack replied; "and I cannot afford to be idle now."

"Anyhow, you have known better days," said Lashton.

"That will depend on what you mean by better," Jack answered, laughing. "I think on the whole I am more contented now than I have ever been, and I am certain I am more useful."

"But you have not always been compelled to work!"

"Unfortunately, no. How to earn my living did not

come within the scope of my education, and so I have had to learn everything since."

"And it's been a hard struggle ?"

"Rather. I had to find the bottom first, and that was the hardest part."

"And you have kept up your spirits through it all?"

"Scarcely that; I have nearly lost hope sometimes.

But since I began to see my way, my spirits have gradually revived."

"And you hope for a better position than that of a ganger in time?"

"Yes, I do. Still, if nothing better turns up, I shall try to be content."

"Well, I must say you are plucky, and deserve to get on; and my object in speaking to you just now, is to offer you the position of book-keeper in our office. I know you can do the work, and I would like to be your friend."

"It is very kind of you, and I thank you very much," Jack said, with tears in his eyes; "but I think I would rather not accept your offer."

"Not accept it!" said Lashton, in astonishment; "and why not?"

"Well, I think I can learn more where I am."

"I do not quite understand you," Lashton answered.

"Well, to be candid with you, I want to learn this business of railway-making so thoroughly, that in time, should ever the opportunity offer, I might take a contract on my own account."

"Robinson, you are right," said Lashton, after a pause; "and, what is more, as sure as I'm alive, you shall not lack the opportunity."

And grasping Jack by the hand, he marched quickly away; while our hero returned to his work, feeling that in Lashton he had found a kindred spirit and a true friend.

CHAPTER XXVIL

A NARROW ESCAPE.

WELVE months after the conversation reported in the last chapter, Jack Formby placed his foot upon the second rung of the ladder, with high hopes, though not without considerable fear and misgiving. He had invested all his savings in tools and plant, and had borrowed *fifty pounds* besides.

With these preliminaries, he had taken the fateful step, and was now—in a small way it is true—a railway contractor.

During all these months, Tom Lashton had been a true friend to him, giving him frequently very valuable advice, and assisting him in every other possible way. And when, at length a piece of work required to be done that was just in Jack's line, he sent in his tender at once, which was accepted.

How much Tom Lashton had to do in this matter, was never recorded.

Jack required about thirty men for his work, and he calculated that he would be able to finish it in seven

months at the outside. Among the first to offer his services was Nick Whiffle, who had stuck to his teetotal resolution ever since his conversation with Jack, and who was frequently heard to declare that he could not only do his work better, but that he could do better work on water than he could on whisky.

Nick's resolution was not without its influence upon others, and many a man drank less, and a few gave up the drink altogether, through his and Jack's example.

If Nick Whiffle, who could thrash any man in the camp with one exception, and "The Duke," who could thrash him, were not ashamed of being teetotalers, there was no reason why any other man should be, and so the force of example told greatly, and as the weeks and months passed away the camp became much less drunken than it had previously been.

Jack had become so popular as a ganger and as a mate, that he had no difficulty in getting thirty as good men as there were in the camp.

From the first he took them into his confidence, and expressed the hope that every man of them would do his best.

To this there was no demur; indeed, every man amongst them declared that he would work as hard as though the contract were his own, and there was not one of them that was not true to his pledge.

As the weeks passed away and lengthened into months, Jack's fears and misgivings gradually vanished. The work went steadily on without hindrance or mishap of any kind, and he saw very clearly that if the same good fortune attended him for a month or two longer,

he would not only be able to repay the fifty pounds he had borrowed, but would put twice that amount into his pocket.

It was a bright, golden day in September, about three months after he had commenced his contract, when a circumstance transpired that affected him greatly. He was standing at the entrance of a short tunnel, giving some directions about a particular piece of work, when something attracted his attention—he could never remember afterwards what—and he stepped back a few paces from where he had been standing, when suddenly, and without warning, a huge piece of rock, weighing several tons, fell directly on the spot where he had stood a moment before.

Had it fallen two seconds earlier, it must inevitably have crushed him to death. Such a narrow escape he had never experienced before. For a moment he was horror-stricken; and when he had recovered himself, he walked quietly out among the browning trees with which the whole district was covered, and when out of sight of his men, sat down on a mossy bank and gave himself up to reflection. Why was it he stepped back at the time he did? was the question he asked himself. What was it that attracted his attention? Was it a mere accidental occurrence; a lucky escape; or was there a Providence in this?

"If I hadn't stepped back the moment I did," he said to himself, "I should have been now a dead man. And what does that mean? Am I fit for death? Am I ready to render up to God an account of my life? Have I been doing my duty? God help me! I have not. I have been here more than two years, and I have not been twice

during that time in a house of prayer. My only thought has been how to get on in the world; and I have acted as though I had no soul, and as though the men about me had no souls either. I wonder what Ada would think if she were to see me here. She would praise me, doubtless, for my energy and perseverance, and industry; but how my neglect of all higher things would pain her! But of higher importance still is the question, What does God think of me? Surely it is in His Mercy that He has sent me this warning."

And all unconsciously he clasped his hands together, while the prayer escaped his lips, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" And out of the silent wood came a whisper, as though a summer's zephyr shook all the myriad leaves about him and awoke them into speech: "Go, stand and speak to the people all the words of this life."

Instantly he sprang to his feet and looked round him; but no one was visible, though the leaves were trembling still.

"Did some one speak," he said, "or was it all a fancy? Surely this narrow escape has upset my nerves; and yet, why did those words, of all others, occur to me? Now I remember. I once heard the Vicar of Essebrig preach a sermon from them when I was a lad. What a curious thing memory is! But what spirit was it that played upon my memory just then? I must think of this;" and he wended his way slowly back to the works,

But for the rest of the day the words haunts him, and would not be hushed. He felt as though he had stood upon the brink of death, and had been suddenly called

back again to life; and called back for a purpose. He had not finished his work, and God, in mercy, had allowed him to return—had given him another chance.

"I will go to church on Sunday," he said to himself; "it will be a pleasant walk to Fernbeck village, and it will be setting a good example to the others."

And when Sunday morning came, he started for the tramp through a regular downpour of rain. He felt, somehow, that to go to church was a religious act, and that that was all he was expected to do. But all the while the words kept ringing in his ears. "Go, stand and speak to the people all the words of this life."

And when he had gone a mile, he telt it was of no use going further. "I shall not hear the sermon if I go," he said to himself. "How strange that those words should haunt me in this fashion."

Then he began to debate the question as to whether there might be a higher duty in his case than going to church. What of these hundreds of men in the camp? Was religion just a question of looking after his own soul, or did it mean seeking the salvation of others? Might not that be the way to save his own soul?

And the more he debated these questions, the more perplexed he felt. Again and again the prayer escaped his lips, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" and always the same answer was given.

He turned back, at length, and made straight for the camp. In a long, low, wooden shed, that served as dining-room, nearly all the men were congregated. It was too wet for them to venture out of doors, and the public-houses within reach would not be open for several hours yet, and so they were whiling away the time as best they

could—some in conversation, some smoking quietly by themselves, and others engaged in card-playing and pitchand-toss.

Everybody looked up as Jack entered, for he was rarely seen on a Sunday, his usual custom being to stroll out alone into the woods and dream of other days, and build his castles in the air.

The old cognomen, "The Duke," was rarely used now. Much more frequently he was spoken of as "Maister Robinson." His own men spoke of him as the gaffer or the boss, but of his real name no one knew.

"I thought I would look in and see you this morning," he said, seeing that every eye was turned on him, and everyone was waiting for him to speak. "I hardly know why I have come, but something has impelled me. You all know what a narrow escape I had on Friday morning."

"Aye, aye, it were a narrow squeak," came from several voices.

"Well, it's made me think of other things than mere eating and drinking and working," he went on. "We are not animals, mates; we are men, and death is not the end of us, and I think we all of us ought to try more than we do, to live as we shall wish we had, when we come to the finish."

"Aye, that's true, gaffer," said Nick Whiffle; "my mother used to tell me the same thing when I was a youngster, and she kept on a-sayin' it till she died," and the big giant wiped his hands across his eyes in unmistakable emotion.

"I'm not much of a talker," Jack went on, "but I used to go to church and chapel when I was a lad, and I

know the Bible pretty well; and if you wouldn't mind I could come up on a Sunday morning and read a chapter or two to you, and we might have a little talk together, and so encourage each other to live better lives."

"Well, it's very kind o' you, an' it would be better nor lying and swearin' 'ere all Sunday mornin', any road," someone said.

"I do not wish to do anything that would not be generally agreeable," Jack said. "I don't profess to be better than you, but if we can help each other to be better, and encourage each other in what is good, I don't think we should regret it in the end."

"Likely not," said someone; "but we don't want no preachin' 'ere; if we wanted stuff o' that sort we could go to church."

"Could we?" someone said, in reply. "A lot thee knows about it, Bill Stuggins. If we were to go to church this minit, the whole lot o' us, just as we are, the sexton 'ud shut the door agin us, an' the grand folks 'ud turn up their een an' noses in horror; an' th' parson 'ud sniffle an' persuade us to go to some mission-room or dissenters' meetin' 'ouse. I knows all about 'it, for I've tried it on more than onest."

At this there was a general laugh, after which Nick Whiffle spoke again.

"I think it are real kind o' the boss to care for us in this way, for nobody else does; an' those o' us who don't want to hear needn't listen; and those on us who do, 'll find it a sight more sensible, I guess, than listenin' to a parson in his white shirt, a-dronin' away up in his big salt-box about what nobody knows nothin' about but hissel'."

"Well, that's a good 'un for thee, Nick," somebody shouted, "an' I'll be one as 'll be glad to listen, if The Duke 'll give us a stave now an' then."

"Well, suppose we take a show of hands," said Jack, "that will be the easiest way of deciding it."

This was no sooner suggested than carried out, and much to Jack's surprise, only half-a-dozen voted against it, though a great many did not vote at all.

Jack felt justified, therefore, in commencing on the following Sunday; and beginning with St. Matthew's gospel, he read straight ahead, pausing now and then to answer a question, or give a word of explanation.

To a great many the gospel story was entirely new; to others it awoke memories of childhood's days, when they learned to lisp the name of Jesus at their mother's knee. To all it was suggestive of higher and better things, touching the fibres of their better nature, and responding to the deepest questions of their hearts.

Thus, almost without note or comment, the New Testament was read through from beginning to end. It took Jack many weeks, but there were very few interruptions considering the number of his auditors, and the free-and-easy character of the gatherings, while the attention was remarkably good, and the attendance steadily increased Sabbath by Sabbath.

Jack made no attempt to expound the Gospels or Epistles, or to formulate a creed. His thought was—"If this be God's truth it will speak for itself, and every man will hear and understand that which meets his need."

Perhaps he was not far wrong in that, but be that as it may, a change came slowly but surely over the lives of many of the men. There was less quarrelling, less drunkenness, less gambling, while a more gentle, generous, and forgiving spirit began to prevail, and to make itself felt throughout the camp.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

TO THE RESCUE.

URING the winter or early spring, the camp was removed across the hills to another valley nearly four miles away. It was not equal for situation to Fernbeck Vale, the ground being wet and boggy, while the district was even more thinly populated than the one they had left. But they were once more close to their work, and that atoned for any disadvantage in point of situation or lack of natural beauty.

Jack, having completed his contract, and done well by it in every sense, had launched out in a still larger undertaking, chiefly through the advice and assistance of Tom Lashton. Instead of thirty men, he had now over two hundred in his employ, and was generally regarded as a wonderfully capable and successful man.

Scarcely had the hot weather commenced, however, than two or three men in the camp were smitten down almost simultaneously with typhoid fever, and in a few weeks the dread disease had become epidemic.

In a very short time there was a general exodus from the wooden village. Many of the men seemed horrorstricken, and positively refused to enter the camp again as soon as they had discovered the true nature of the disease. As a consequence, the sick in some instances were left to suffer and die alone, without a single friend to smooth their fevered pillow, or cheer with a word of hope their pathway to the grave.

Two doctors rode over from Bradfield every day, and three or four nurses had heroically volunteered their services to assist the fever-stricken and dying men; but as the epidemic steadily increased, their services proved sadly inefficient, while they (the nurses) were in danger of failing altogether through sheer exhaustion and fatigue.

The doctors did what they could to get other nurses to come, but the task was not an easy one. A navvy encampment is a place that people do not care to enter, especially when smitten with a fell disease; and women who had been used to Hospital work shrank from coming unprotected into such a place.

A few, however, resolutely put every other feeling aside than that of common humanity, and bravely faced the danger; and more than one crowned her heroism with her life, and was laid to sleep in a martyr's grave.

Jack was lodging at a farmhouse two miles away from the works. But as soon as he learned the true state of affairs, he called his gangers, of whom Nick Whiffle was one.

"Look here, men," he said; "our brethren are dying uncared for and untended. I am going to the rescue. I may fall; God only knows! it won't much matter if I do,

for I am alone in the world. But my duty is clear; I have learnt it from the Book as I have read it to you Sunday by Sunday. Do the best you can with the work, and make an honest job of it, whatever the cost. If I die, I shouldn't like it said when I'm in my grave that I scamped my work."

"Never fear," was the answer, "everything shall be attended to as if you were on the spot."

"But I'd like to be excused," said Nick Whiffle, quite abruptly.

"Excused?" said Jack in astonishment.

"Aye! I'd like you to put another man in as ganger and let me go with you."

"Could you nurse the sick," said Jack.

"I'd try, any road," said the giant.

"Then you shall come," said Jack, and he turned away his head to hide the tears that came suddenly to his eyes.

Nick was ready to follow Jack to the world's end if needs be, and nothing pleased him better than to be allowed to stand by his master's side in any danger or difficulty.

The camp had a sadly deserted appearance. Many of the late occupants had erected tents and rude shanties here and there on the hill sides. Some were sleeping at nights in out-houses, and some in the open air. Yet a great many stayed; some out of mere bravado, others in the belief that they would be as safe there as elsewhere, so long as they did not go into the cabins where the feverstricken lay; and one or two, more true-hearted than the rest, remained to nurse a brother or a friend.

Jack's presence was everywhere hailed with expressions of wonder and delight, and rude men, who had abused

and insulted him when he first came into their midst, three years ago, now kissed his hand, and bedewed it with their tears as he ministered to their wants. Nor was Nick Whiffle's presence much less a surprise. He followed Jack everywhere, and did everything he was told to do. From cabin to cabin they passed, with quick but silent footsteps; and had they been two angels from heaven their presence could not have been more welcome.

Both were strong and could easily lift the helpless navvies in their arms, while the nurses made their beds; hence their assistance was invaluable. Many of the poor fellows were delirious and raved and blasphemed in the most shocking manner. Some pathetically called for wife, or children, that they had left in towns or villages far away; others were moaning and writhing in the last agony.

To one and all Jack's presence acted like a charm. He had always been a sweet and gentle influence among them. He had known better days. All knew that now. Yet he was ever a man amongst men, putting on no airs, and claiming no superiority. As a consequence, he had easily overcome their prejudices, and early won their confidence and affection; and now, at the risk of his own life, he had come amongst them, daring the danger that he might do them good. Such conduct penetrated the hard crust of their natures as nothing else could, and filled them with wonder and admiration.

The fever proved of a very malignant type, and, as a consequence, nearly two-thirds of those who were attacked died. Some passed away gently, as though asleep; while others, conscious to the last, writhed in terrible agony, and piteously prayed that they might be released from their sufferings.

When Jack had a little time at his disposal, he sat by their bedsides, and read to them out of the old Book, which had become very precious to him in those days; and sometimes he knelt upon the floor, and offered up a simple prayer, that the good God would look down upon them with pitying eye, and in His mercy spare them. And while he read and prayed, the tears would come into the sufferers' eyes, and roll silently down their cheeks. It made them think of other and happier days, and brought to their recollection memories of their childhood and youth. Often he found them writhing in pain, and left them with a smile of sweet content upon their weather-beaten faces. And the giant at his side would look on and wonder. Nick's affection for Jack almost amounted to reverence, and to serve him was a constant joy.

As the days passed on, and lengthened into weeks, the anxiety and loss of sleep began to tell upon both; but they made no complaint, and never relaxed their efforts. Sometimes they sat together for a few minutes out in the open air, in the cool of the evening; but it was very rarely that many words passed between them. Yet it was very sweet to drink in the sweet breath of evening, and listen to the song of the lark, high up in the cloudless sky, all unconscious of pain or sorrow.

The district was not beautiful, as we have said, though sometimes the sunsets were glorious—the rich and changing colours of the sky baffling all description; and after the sight of the blanched and suffering faces of the stricken navvies, and the stifling atmosphere of their narrow rooms, it was a joy to gaze on the sunset sky, and breathe the pure breath of heaven.

On one of the hottest days of the season three of their

comrades had been buried. They had only died on the previous evening; but such an epidemic as this would brook no delay—the sooner the grave closed over the dead the better for the living.

Jack felt in a very sober mood, as he sat alone for a few minutes in the sunset glow. He knew not but that he might be the next to fall, and he was debating with himself whether he should not reveal his true name, and leave a message behind him, in case he died, for Ada and his cousin Ralph.

Ever since he left Bodelford, now nearly four years ago, he had been known by the name of John Robinson. He had never meant it to be permanent, and yet the time had never come when he could conveniently throw aside his incognito and stand forth in his true name.

On the other hand, what did it matter? He had no relative in the world save Ralph, and he very much questioned whether he cared whether he were alive or dead. And, as for Ada, he did not see how she could be benefited by hearing the truth, supposing he were to die. If he fell a victim to this fever, he might as well die as John Robinson, and be forgotten.

And if he lived? Well, he had resolved long since to take a trip to Essebrig in early autumn, and make inquiries; and if Ada were still single, he would make himself known and plead his love once more; and if she were married, he would return again to his work, and bear his cross as patiently as he could, and try to do his duty.

While these thoughts were passing through his mind, Nick Whiffle came and stood by his side.

"Yon's a bonny sky, gaffer," he said, looking steadily at the glowing west.

- "Yes, it's very beautiful," Jack answered.
- "Do you think there's owt now behind all that glory an' gold?—any better country, where there's no fever nor trouble nor sin? Where the little childer be all 'appy, an' the bigger people all good?"
 - "Yes, Nick, I believe there is."
- "Well, I'm mighty glad to hear you say that, tho' I don't know as it much matters, for I guess it ain't for such ruck as me."

Jack looked up at the giant with one of his old, winsome smiles, and answered,

- "I guess it's for everybody, Nick, that trusts in the Lord Jesus, and tries to do his duty."
- "Well, now," said Nick, with a smile, "you've always the knack o' sayin' things purty, an' puttin' the best side out, an' yet I never know'd you to deceive any o' us."

Jack smiled again, and answered,

"I should gain nothing by trying to deceive you, or any one. And what I said I meant. The Book tells us that the good God loves us all, and that the Lord Jesus died for everybody. Nothing can be plainer than that."

"No; it seems pretty square speakin'," Nick answered, while a dreamy, far-away look came into his eyes, as though he saw something far away beyond the sunset.

For awhile neither spoke, and the evening quiet remained unbroken, save for the song of a thrush far up the hillside, and an occasional moan from the sufferers within.

"I hope poor Joe an' the rest on 'em are better off," Nick spoke at length. "But Joe Pearce were like a brother to me. I wish the Lord 'ad spared 'im."

"The Lord knows best," Jack answered, reverently.

¹ And Joe especially seemed glad to go. He was afraid if he got well he might go back again to old ways. Now he is safe."

"Aye, gaffer, you're right in that. I wish I were as safe as he. An' if I were ready, I wouldn't mind goin' too. It must be mighty purty away younder." And Nick pointed with his large forefinger to where the few clouds were glowing in the amber light.

Jack lifted his eyes to the sunset sky, but did not speak. But Nick was surprised a few minutes later at hearing him sing, in a sweet tenor voice, a verse of an old hymn that he had often heard his mother sing —

"No chilling wind or poisonous breath Can reach that healthful shore; Sickness and sorrow, pain and death, Are felt and feared no more."

The sufferers heard the song also, and lifted their heads to listen—it was as though an angel had come down and was chanting a song of Paradise—while Nick brushed his large hand across his eyes, and as soon as the singing ceased, turned without a word and entered one of the cabins.

CHAPTER XXIX.

BEYOND THE SUNSET.

N the following day Nick Whiffle was smitten down with the fever, and for eighteen days and nights Jack nursed him almost without intermission; and then, with his head upon Jack's shoulder, the kindly-spirited giant breathed out his soul into the hands of God.

No sufferer ever more truly deserved the name of "Patient" than he. Never a murmur escaped his lips. Day after day he lay writhing in agony, growing weaker and weaker all the while, yet he uttered no complaint, nor ever seemed to trouble about himself.

From the first he believed he would not get better, and was quite reconciled to his fate. He had fastened upon the simple truths of the Gospel, and had hidden them in his heart; and when once he had apprehended their meaning, all doubt and fear vanished, and he lay day after day waiting for the coming of the angel that should un-

lock the beautiful sunset gates, and let him through into the light and beauty of the better life.

For Jack he had always a smile of welcome; and yet he was ever afraid that he was receiving more attention than was his due, or that Jack was giving himself unnecessary trouble.

"I like to 'ave yer near," he would say; "but yer musn't wear yerself out for me—I'll be all right. It's a longuish tunnel this, but I'll be out inter the daylight by-m'-by."

"You're not sorry you gave up your work to come and nurse the sick?" Jack said to him one day.

"Oh no!" he answered with a smile, "I'm very glad. I think it's about the best bit o' work I've ever done."

"Well, perhaps it is," Jack answered; "but you'll do other good work when you get better."

Nick smiled again, then answered: "No, gaffer, you're wrong there. I've finished my contract. The day is nearly up. I'm waiting for the bell to ring, an' then I shall go to sleep, an' wake up in a better country nor this."

"Do you really think you will not get better?" Jack asked, in some surprise.

"Aye, I'm quite sure on it," was the answer. "I've know'd it from the first."

"Nonsense!" said Jack, cheerily; "that's mere fancy. You have a splendid constitution, and you are almost certain to pull through."

"You may think so, gaffer, but I knows better. I know'd what was comin' that evenin' when I spoke to you outside."

"You did not mention it," Jack said.

"No, but it were in my heart; and the little verse you sang 'as been ringin' like a bell inside me ever since. I wish you would sing it again, if it bain't too much trouble."

"I've quite forgotten what it was," Jack answered.

"Well, I can't put it together straight, but it were about the sickness never comin', and the sorrow all ended, an' the fever never risin' from the swamps."

"Oh, I know!" said Jack; and, sitting by his dying mate, he sang the verse again and again; and, later in the day, three of the nurses joined him, and they sang together the hymn beginning—

"There is a land of pure delight,"

from the first verse to the last; while Nick listened as though entranced, and forgot all about his weakness and pain as the plaintive strains floated about him.

As the days passed on, Jack became of Nick's opinion—the giant's strength was evidently failing fast, and it became abundantly clear to those who waited upon him that his days were numbered. He was soon too weak to speak, except in the faintest whisper; but with wistful eyes he followed Jack about the room, as though eager not to lose sight of him for a moment.

Jack easily interpreted the giant's look, and kept near him all the while, now moistening his parched lips, and now laying damp cloths upon his scorching brow, and when the poor fellow could no longer speak, he would smile his thanks.

He seemed perfectly content, and never once through all his illness expressed a desire to get better. The hope of a beautiful home beyond the sunset seemed to fill all his life, and when in his delirium he rambled in his speech, it was only to talk about his mother and the bright country where pain and fever would never come.

A few hours before he died, he seemed suddenly to recover his strength, and spoke again in his old tone of voice. But Jack had witnessed the same symptoms in more than one of the poor fellows that had died, and so was not deceived thereby.

"I'm nearly through the tunnel, gaffer," Nick said. "It's been very tough an' 'ard, but I'm nearly through. The light is beginnin' to glimmer, an' I'll soon be on t'other side. You've been very good to me, gaffer, an' I never loved a fellow like I love you. You fought me fair an' clean, an' licked me straight, an' I've loved yer ever sin'. We'll meet again—above, where th' clouds burn red, an' 'igher nor even the larks get to sing. An' mother's waitin' for me. I seen her in a dream las' night. I know I'm goin'; I've seen the others go. Hark, that's the clock beginnin' to strike."

And the poor fellow paused with a bewildered air, and looked strangely round the room.

"Hold my hand, mate," he said, after a pause, "for it's getting very dark again."

And Jack took the giant's hand, and held it with a firm and steady grip.

For awhile no other word was spoken, but Jack saw that even now the poor fellow was at the fording of the river.

"You'll not forget me altogether?" Nick whispered at length.

"No, Nick; I shall never forget you," Jack answered.

"Will you ax the Lord Jesus to hold me tight?" he said; "I'm gettin' very weak."

And scarcely had the words escaped his lips when his head fell against Jack's arm, and without a moan he passed away into the silent land "where the wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest."

For a week before Nick died there had been no fresh case of fever, and every one began to hope that the dread epidemic had run its course and spent all its strength. Hence great was the regret when, two days after, Jack himself was smitten down with all the worst symptoms of the disease.

It was just what he had all along expected, and so was quite prepared for it; nor was he at all concerned about the issue. He felt that he was in the hands of God, and that what He willed was best.

He noted the troubled look on the doctor's face without alarm. He knew he had been weakened by long and constant watching by the bedsides of others, and that, as a consequence, he was not so well able to battle with the disease as he would otherwise have been. But the reflection did not trouble him. He had tried to do his duty, and was content to abide by the result.

The only thing that troubled him was his incognito. Should he take someone—the doctor, for instance—into his confidence, and explain to him who he was and where he came from? or should he still retain his disguise, and, if he died, be buried with the name of John Robinson upon his coffin?

It was a difficult question to decide. Had he brothers and sisters living, his duty would be clear. Indeed, he

would have informed them of his whereabouts long since; but being an orphan and alone, he was at a loss to know what to do for the best.

He was debating the question with himself one afternoon, when the doctor entered.

"Well, Robinson, how are you to-day?" the doctor said in cheery tones.

"About the same, thank you," Jack said feebly, "the fever seems to be running its usual course."

"You are getting down into the dumps, I fear," the doctor said, "it will never do to let your spirits flag. We must keep you interested in life, and in the world if we can."

Jack smiled feebly, but did not answer.

"Well, come listen to this, and you will learn how the world is interested in you."

"In me!" said Jack, in a tone of surprise.

"Aye, in you! Why, the Bradfield Mercury devotes nearly a column to your doings, and in praise of your heroism."

"Now, you are making fun of me."

"Nay, I am not. I was never more serious in my life. Yesterday's issue contains a long article, headed 'Heroism of everyday life,' in which, my friend, you come in for the lion's share of the praise."

"Then don't read it to me," said Jack, "I would rather not hear it."

"Well, then, I'll leave the paper, and you will be able to read it for yourself, at your leisure."

"I fear that will be a long time first, doctor, I'm too weak to read, almost to think."

"Oh, nonsense," said the doctor, laying his fingers upon his wrist, "you've got a lot of vitality yet."

"And I shall need it all," Jack answered, with a feeble smile.

"Well, keep your heart up, at any rate, and I will run over again to-morrow;" and the next moment he was gone.

Before the day was over, Jack's curiosity got the better of him, and he took occasional glances at the newspaper that was lying on his bed; and though he had not strength to read it all, he was able to gather its drift.

"I didn't think I was such a hero," he said to himself, with a winterly smile; "and, for myself, I do not care for such praise, and yet I would like Ada to see this, and know that it referred to me."

"But then she may be married by this, and perhaps has quite forgotten me; and, if I reveal my name now, people will say it was all through vanity and pride. I think I had better keep my secret still."

When the doctor called on the following day, he was quite delirious, and so the secret remained undisclosed.

"I fear he will not pull through," the doctor said, as he stood talking with the nurse for a few minutes outside the door; "his strength was quite exhausted, to start with."

"Such a death is very sad," said the nurse, " and yet very glorious."

"It is strange no one can find out anything relative to his antecedents," the doctor said; "he is evidently wellborn."

"Yes, he is a gentleman, in every sense; but about

the past he is silent. Even in his delirium he betrays nothing."

"It is very strange," said the doctor, mounting his horse---" very strange;" then, raising his hat, he galloped away.





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CHAPTER XXX.

REVIVING HOPES.

pronounced his opinion that Jack would not recover, Ada Woodville might have been seen sitting under a tall sycamore tree that grew in front of Trevena House, with a copy of the West Briton newspaper lying upon her lap.

It was a still, drowsy afternoon, with scarcely breeze enough to stir a blade of grass. Far out in the bay and beyond the headland, she could see the great ocean lying still as a summer pool; while in the valley below the river glided on with scarcely a ripple upon its bosom, and without a murmur to disturb the quiet of the afternoon. The village children were all at school, and the fishermen were too far out at sea for their songs to be heard; even the birds had ceased their singing; while the cattle lazily chewed their cuds down by the waterside, and seemed too content to make a sound.

Ada had nearly fallen asleep when her eye was arrested by a paragraph headed "Heroism in every-day life." This

was followed by a description of a navvy encampment in Yorkshire, the breaking-out of an epidemic of fever, the terror of many of the men, and the heroism of the nurses, who went from Bradfield to nurse the stricken navvies. "But prominently among the rest," the article went on to say, "will stand out the name of Mr. John Robinson, one of the sub-contractors. Three years ago. Mr. Robinson came into the Fernbeck Valley seeking work as a navvy. Though dressed as an ordinary labourer, it was seen at once that he was no common man. Young in years, handsome in appearance, graceful in movement, correct in speech, he became at once a man of mark. Perhaps it would have been more correct to say he became a target at which the more jealous and ungenerous part of the camp hurled their shafts of scorn and insult. They nicknamed him 'The Duke,' and persecuted him in every possible way. All this he bore, however, without complaining. Never did he show any resentment, and whenever he could do his persecutors a good turn he did it. At first, it was thought he was lacking in courage and energy, but he soon undeceived them, and in an encounter with the champion of the camp, into which he was driven, he came off victor. This display of courage and skill turned the tide in his favour, and he soon became a general favourite. As a workman, he early attracted the notice of his employer; never slovenly, never late; whatever he did, he did with his might. As a consequence, he was soon elevated to the position of From this, chiefly through the influence of the son of the chief-contractor (Sir Francis Lashton), he was enabled to take a small contract on his own account, and carried it through with marked ability and success.

This prepared the way to the position he now occupies as one of the largest sub-contractors. Such rapid success is not often witnessed in these times. During the last year Mr. Robinson has conducted a weekly Bible reading amongst the navvies with marked ability, and when the fever broke out, and the terror-stricken men were leaving the camp by scores, and the sick and dying were left uncared for, this young hero called his men together, and told them they must carry on their work without him, as he was going to the rescue of his stricken comrades. the work well,' he said, 'and don't let it be said, if I die, that anything I undertook was done badly.' From that day till the day he himself was smitten down, he was ever at the bedsides of the sufferers. With all the strength of a man, and with all the tenderness of a woman, he ministered to the wants of the sick and dying, until they blessed him as an angel from heaven. And now he himself lies at the point of death, surely all good people and true will join in the prayer that a life of so much value and promise may be spared. Whether or not he has any friends or relatives in the country no one can tell. Of his past life he is silent. That he is a gentleman by birth and education, there can be no doubt. That he is a gentleman in a much higher sense is equally certain, and all who admire real worth, in whatever station it may be found, will cherish the hope that his sickness may not have a fatal termination.—Bradfield Mercury."

Ada was wide enough awake long before she reached the end of the article. "Can it be possible," was her thought, "that this is Jack Formby."

It was now getting on to three years and a half ago since she saw that face in the crowd which had so strangely affected her. If that were Jack, he might then be on his way to Yorkshire. And yet, if it were he, he would surely have made himself known long before this.

Ada had long since given up Jack as dead, though his image remained enshrined in her heart as firmly as ever. Scarcely a day passed that she did not look at his portrait in her album, and think of what might have been, if she had given him a word of hope when first he declared his love.

During the past three years she had spent nearly all her time at Trevena. Since Dick had left Netherby Hall, it had never seemed quite the same to her; besides which, so many painful memories gathered about the place, that she felt happier in her Cornish home than anywhere else.

The new vicarage had been completed now more than a year, so that Mr. Tregony no longer occupied her old home. But she had secured an excellent couple (man and wife) as gardener and housekeeper, and felt much less lonely than she had anticipated. Madge came up to Trevena House every day, or else she went down to the vicarage; and so the days, and months, and seasons came and went, and Ada was as happy as she ever expected to be on earth.

Yet she knew that this state of things could not always continue. To live the life of an old maid was by no means her ideal of a woman's life: and though she could never love another as she had loved Jack Formby, she thought she might be happy and very useful as the wife of his cousin Ralph.

He had been wonderfully kind to her during the past three years, and made quite a name in the county as an earnest philanthropist and a brilliant speaker. The little village of Trevena was quite in love with him, for he had spoken at three crowded meetings, and had stirred their enthusiasm to the highest pitch. Mr. Tregony had taken to him as he had never taken to anyone before in his life, while Ada could not help regarding him with growing admiration.

Only a few weeks ago he had formally proposed to her, and at her earnest solicitation he had agreed to wait for her answer until October, when he would be visiting Cornwall again. He had little doubt that the answer would be what he desired. If she had meant to reject him she would have done so at once; he knew she was incapable of an act of unkindness, and would therefore never be so cruel as to keep him waiting in suspense for three months and then throw him over.

Practically she had accepted him; so he argued with himself, and he quite anticipated being master of Trevena House by Christmas, or early in the new year at latest.

He was very little at Bodelford now. To begin with, he and Mr. Toadsby were not so friendly as formerly, and he was afraid if he remained in Bodelford they might come to an open rupture, which would be a very awkward affair; for, as he said to himself, "Toadsby wouldn't mind a bit confessing himself a rogue to prove that I am one;" hence a quarrel with Toadsby was to be avoided. Then, in the second place, he found it would be more convenient, and much more advantageous to himself, to have the headquarters of the "Imperial Federation" in London than in any provincial city.

And in the third place, he did not care to be constantly under the eye of John Formby, Sen. "The less the old

fool sees of me the better he'll like me, and the greater my chance of being his heir," he said to himself.

Under these circumstances, therefore, he had removed to London, and found that the change answered admirably. Donations and subscriptions flowed constantly into the funds of the "Federation," while the profits from "Imperial Badges" formed quite a snug little income.

With John Formby he kept up a regular correspondence, and was evidently growing in favour with that individual. His only fear was that Toadsby might some day "play the fool," as he put it, and out of sheer spite expose him to the world. Should the time ever come when the public demanded an investigation of his affairs, he knew that his game would be up. If Toadsby kept silent he had little to fear. If, on the other hand, Toadsby began to tattle, he might have to hurry away suddenly without even the chance of saying good-bye to his friends.

He rarely, however, let any thoughts of Toadsby trouble him. He had played his game with so much skill for so many years, that he had very little fear relative to the future.

To Ada he confided all his plans, or appeared to do; and when attempting some new philanthropic enterprise, would sometimes write asking her her opinion or soliciting her advice.

This was naturally very gratifying to our heroine. To do good was her greatest joy, and to render assistance to one so fertile in schemes for the elevation of the human race as Ralph Formby, was something to be proud of. She sometimes wondered how it was that she gave all her heart and all her love to idle, wasteful, easy-going Jack, while for his noble, self-sacrificing cousin she had only a sisterly regard at best.

It was strange to her that her heart should still cling to Jack's memory, and that, in spite of reason and logic, she kept fancying that he might some day appear suddenly upon the scene.

She had told Madge again and again, that she quite believed now that Jack was dead; that she had no longer the smallest reason for cherishing the hope that he might be alive; and yet, in spite of it all, her love lived and her hope would not die.

And now this newspaper paragraph was as the breath of heaven to the dying embers. The flame shot up again and seemed to illumine all her life. Again and again she read the paragraph, and then gave herself up to reflection.

"It must be he," she said to herself. "The time will correspond, and Jack was just the man to do a noble work like that. He would not shrink from labour or self-sacrifice, for he had not a selfish fibre in him. But why has he kept silent? Ah, now I know! It was to try me as well as himself. He spoke to me that day on which he left his kiss upon my lips of coming back in four or five years. I knew that he was noble from the first, and only wanted the opportunity to show his worth. And now he has made the country ring with his praise, but has hidden his real name. Oh, yes, it is Jack! Something tells me that I cannot be mistaken, and something tells me, too, that he will recover, and that I shall see his face again."

She did not show the paragraph to Madge, or say anything of the hopes and fears that haunted her. But every

day she scanned the papers, with an anxious face, and with a throbbing heart, and when a fortnight had passed away and no further intelligence was vouchsafed, she wrote a timid letter of enquiry to the editor of the *Bradfield Mercury*, and waited anxiously for the answer.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A MOMENT OF MADNESS.

IFTEEN anxious days came and went, and still no answer to the letter. She had grown quite pale with hope deferred, and was at her wits' end to know what course to adopt in order to get hold of the information she desired. On the sixteenth day, however, she received by post a copy of the Bradfield Mercury of the previous day. Hastily tearing off the wrapper, she quickly discovered a paragraph, crossed at the corners with blue lead, and in a moment had devoured its contents.

The fever epidemic had died out. John Robinson was the last attacked. Everybody would rejoice that he was now convalescent, and had been ordered away for change of air.

The paragraph contained many other items of interest, but the above was all that Ada saw in her first rapid glance, and was all, indeed, she desired to know.

The conviction that John Robinson was none other than Jack Formby, now amounted in her mind to an absolute certainty, and if he had walked into the house at that very moment she would not have been in the least surprised.

"He will come some day," she said to herself, "so I will be on the watch. He told me more than once that he never loved but me, and that he should never love another, and I know he will come;" and she began to hum to herself:

"He is coming, my own, my sweet, Were it ever so airy a tread, My heart would hear it and beat, Were it earth in an earthy bed."

For a while she did not notice a letter that had come by the same post, though the handwriting was almost as familiar to her as her own.

When she picked it up at length, something very near akin to a frown darkened her face.

"I wonder what Ralph can want," she said to herself, as she tore open the envelope.

"'Coming again next week,'" she said, half aloud as she quickly scanned the epistle. "'Not very well'—well I am sorry for that. 'Wants to have some talk with me relative to some new undertaking. Shall spend a few days at the farm on the cliffs—his old quarters. Remembers my request, and will honourably wait for my answer till October. But is nevertheless hungering for a sight of my face.'

"Oh, nonsense," she said, half petulantly, "Ralph is splendid until he begins to talk love, and yet I had quite resolved to accept his offer. I am thankful I asked him to wait. It would have been better for both if I had said no at the first, for this new hope has changed everything."

Yet day after day she kept the hope to herself, not even taking Madge into her confidence. It would be such a surprise to her friend if Jack should turn up, and how proud she would be to introduce him as the hero of the navvy camp on the Yorkshire Moors.

Madge had never cared for Ralph. Did not care for him now. Did not want her to be his wife. "But she will like Jack, I know, and when she hears the story of his bravery, won't she open her eyes."

So Ada communed with herself as the days passed on, and she kept hoping that Jack would come. "He knows that my home is at Trevena," she said to herself, "and he will find his way. Would it not be a surprise to Ralph to come and find Jack here; that would settle everything without any further trouble."

Now and then a fear haunted her that her hope after all might prove a delusion—that this brave John Robinson was only John Robinson, and no one else. But she never entertained it for long together; every day she listened for Jack's footfalls, and hoped that before evening she would see his face.

By a strange coincidence, Jack and Ralph travelled into Cornwall on the same day, though they travelled by different trains, and alighted at different stations.

Jack had three objects in view. Firstly, to look at some work that wanted doing in St. Tivey Bay, with a view to undertaking it. Secondly, to recruit his health; and thirdly, to find, if possible, Ada Woodville.

Sir Francis Lashton had a number of contracts in different parts of the country, among the rest he had undertaken to build a breakwater, and construct a basin or dock at St. Tivey. For the latter, a good deal of excavation was necessary, and so pleased had he been with the work Jack had hitherto done in that direction, that he offered him the first refusal of the work at St. Tivey.

As the railway was now drawing near completion, Jack jumped at the offer, and lost no time in preparing for the journey.

He was still very weak and pale, and scarcely more than a shadow of his former self; but every day he felt his strength returning, and had no doubt that in a few weeks he would feel as strong as ever.

He spent two days at St. Tivey, in what he termed prospecting—that is, in examining the rock, testing the ground, taking measurements, etc; and on the third day he started for Trevena, which, taking a narrow path along the cliffs, was only about five miles away.

He had instituted a number of inquiries while at St. Tivey, respecting the village of Trevena and its inhabitants, and had learned that Ada was the Lady Bountiful of the district; that she spent most of her time in her old home, which at one time it was feared she would not do; that she was still unmarried (though rumour said she was going to be married in the spring); that the bridegroom was a gentleman from the north of England, and a well-known philanthropist; and, lastly, that he had been seen in the neighbourhood within the past few days.

Jack heard all this with very mingled feelings. That Ada admired his Cousin Ralph he knew, and it was not at all unnatural that that admiration should in time grow into love; and if, when he got to Trevena, he discovered that she was actually engaged to be married to Ralph, he would breathe no word of his own love, or of his long-cherished hope, but would accept the inevitable with the

best possible grace, and would wish her every possible joy.

Indeed, he composed a little speech as he sauntered leisurely along the cliffs that sunny August afternoon, to deliver to Ada in case he discovered the rumour of her engagement was true.

"I wonder how she will receive me," he said to himself, "and whether I shall find her as beautiful as when I saw her last. Perhaps, she has forgotten me, for dead people are proverbially soon forgotten, and I have been as dead to her for many years. She will soon recognise me, however, for I have not altered much, and the fever has taken all the tan from my face. I hope I shall be able to keep cool and collected, for I am dreadfully excited."

It seemed a rarely-used path along which he was walking, for he had not met a single individual since he left St. Tivey. He was rather thankful for that, than otherwise. He wanted to be alone so that his imagination might have full play, and his thoughts run on unchecked.

Far down at his feet the long sea swell broke on the rocks with a subdued musical plash, and that was about the only sound that broke the stillness of the afternoon.

Now and then he sat down on some bank or boulder to rest awhile, not that he was tired, or anxious to lengthen out his journey—on the contrary, he was impatient to see Ada face to face and learn the truth from her own lips, and yet he almost dreaded the meeting, lest the dearest hope of his life should be blotted out for ever.

For years past he had tried to do his duty for its own sake; to leave all hope of winning Ada Woodville out of the question. But as he looked back over those years he saw very clearly that the thought of Ada had been ever

present with him, and the hope of winning her approval had been a prominent factor in his life.

It is true, there had been times when that hope had nearly died out, but as he steadily won his way the old hope gradually revived, and to-day it outweighted every other feeling.

At length the hills began to slope in another direction, and he saw in the distance the graceful curve of Trevena Bay. A little farther, and he knew the village would loom into sight, and the very house where lived his love. He might even meet her walking on the cliffs, for she loved the downs in the olden days, and had often pictured to him the scene that was now spread out before him.

He knew the place, though he had never seen it before. He should recognise directly the ivied church among the trees, and the quiet river gliding through the valley. Perhaps he would find her walking in the garden or on the grassy lawn.

Oh, how his heart throbbed, while his breath came in quick, short gasps. In a little while now his fate would be sealed. His life was reaching its climax. The hope of years would be realised, or else——.

A quick, firm step sounded behind him, which he had not heard till this moment. Nearer and nearer it came. He stepped aside to let the stranger pass, and looked him full in the face at the same time.

A mutual exclamation of surprise burst simultaneously from each lip—an involuntary step backward. A startled expression on the new-comer's face, and then their hands met.

[&]quot;Why, Jack, I thought you were dead years ago."

[&]quot;No, Ralph; you see I am living still."

- "And very little changed, by Jove."
- "And you are not changed at all."
- "Thank you. Are you making a long stay here?"
- "I hardly know. I came to St. Tivey three days ago. I am going to Trevena now to see Miss Woodville."
 - "Does she know you are here?"
 - "No; she does not know that I'm alive."
- "You are not aware, then, that we are to be married soon?"
 - "No;" with a sickly smile, "I wish you joy."
- "Thanks, old fellow. I have no doubt I shall be happy. Have you been to Bodelford of late?"
 - " No."
 - "Then you have not seen your uncle John?"
 - "My uncle John?"
- "Yes; he returned from Australia directly after you so mysteriously disappeared."
 - "Indeed; that is strange. I thought he was dead."
 - "As we all thought you were."

For awhile Jack did not reply, while Ralph regarded him with a sinister expression.

- "You are going my way?" Jack said, at length.
- " Yes."

So they walked along side by side, for the most part in silence, for each was busy with his own thoughts.

Jack was thinking chiefly of Ada; Ralph of himself. In a moment all that he had hoped for, plotted for, waited for, sinned for, was in danger of being torn from his grasp. The one barrier that stood between him and wealth, station, happiness, and which he had fondly dreamed had been for ever removed, had suddenly re-appeared.

Why was this man alive? Why should he suddenly

come between him and all that he coveted most? Oh, that he were lying dead upon the rocks below, then his way would be clear and all his ambition would soon be realised.

Their path at this moment skirted the very edge of the cliff. There wasn't a soul in sight. Jack was on the outer edge. A little push and all would be over. No one would ever know—dead men tell no tales.

Quick as a lightning flash all these thoughts passed through his mind. He didn't stay to debate them; the one and only hope of release was close at hand. His enemy was walking by his side unconscious of danger. This might be his last opportunity of escape. Now or never!

In a moment, he turned and with both hands gave Jack a vigorous push.

But the instinct of life is strong, and muscular action is quick in moments of peril. With the first touch of Ralph's hand, Jack caught him by the wrist, and, almost in the act of falling, swung himself round, and stood face to face with his would-be murderer.

"You villain!" he gasped, "you tried to push me over the cliff!"

"Yes!" was the answer; "and I will do it yet!" and he sprang upon him like an infuriated tiger.

He felt now that he must complete the work that he had begun. He had so far compromised himself that it would never do to let Jack escape. Better they both fell over the cliff, than he should fail.

It was a moment of madness, when reason for the time being was completely dethroned, and escape the one dominant idea. The struggle was brief and decisive, yet it seemed an age to both men. Now they swayed on the brink of the cliff, and it seemed as if both would inevitably fall over; now back again to a place of safer footing.

Jack struggled for release; Ralph for conquest. The latter knew, if Jack escaped, he also would have to run for his life, and leave every hope behind him. No half-measure would do. He had gone so far that he must complete his work. Jack, weakened by recent illness, had not half the strength of his opponent; Ralph, like a lion that had tasted blood, had no mercy. Round each other they spun again and again; now poised on the brink of the cliff, now back again.

But Jack was growing weaker all the while, and Ralph had forced him on to his knees. To push him over the cliff was now an easy matter. With his feet hanging over, he had only to unloose his hands. In a moment more that was accomplished, and Jack fell feet foremost, and disappeared from sight.

Ralph, panting and exhausted, stepped quickly back and looked eagerly right and left, but no one was in sight—evidently the struggle had not been seen.

Smoothing his dishevelled hair, and carefully adjusting his necktie, he walked slowly, now in one direction and now in another, but no one appeared upon the scene. Approaching, at length, the scene of the struggle, he looked over the edge of the cliff. Down at its foot the blue waters were surging among the rocks, for the tide was nearly at its height; but nothing was to be seen of Jack.

"If he wasn't killed by the fall, he's been drowned by the tide," he reflected, while the perspiration stood in big drops upon his forehead. "Good God!" he said at length, "that I should have come to this!" and leaving the fatal spot, he hurried away with rapid strides in the direction of a farm-house that could be dimly seen in the distance.

CHAPTER XXXII.

AN ACCUSING CONSCIENCE.

ALPH did not venture out of doors again during the rest of the afternoon and evening. He was much too excited to put in an appearance at Trevena House, and there was no place else he cared to go to. Mrs. Juliff, the farmer's wife, was very much surprised to see him back again so soon, but he excused himself on the plea of a bad headache, and said if he were no better he should not venture out of doors again.

Mrs. Juliff recommended several infallible remedies, one or two of which Ralph readily consented to take, thus leaving no doubt upon the good woman's mind that her lodger was really ill. Indeed, he looked so flushed and excited, and had "such a feverish look about the eyes," to quote Mrs. Juliff, that she was very anxious to send for the doctor. To this, however, Ralph would not submit. Such headaches he said had been common occurrences with him of late, and he had no doubt that a good night's rest would set him right again.

After what had happened, however, a good night's rest

was out of the question. He had done many mean, contemptible, and dishonest things in his life, and had rather prided himself on the possession of a conscience that had grown more and more elastic with years. But to descend to wilful murder was more even than his conscience could pass over without reproach, and the eager pleading look in Jack's eyes as he saw him slip over the cliff, haunted him like a reproachful ghost, and completely banished all sleep from his eyes.

It is true there was some compensation in the fact that he felt absolutely safe. For years past he had been more or less haunted by the fear that Jack might some day turn up quite unexpectedly and disarrange all his plans, and he experienced now a grim satisfaction in the thought that his kinsman was completely settled at last, and would never trouble him or anybody else again.

"I am in luck's way still," he said, with a sardonic smile, "for if the young fool had gone to Bodelford and made himself known to his uncle, or if he had seen Ada before I met him, the case would have been complicated, to say the least. But unless he lied awfully—and I don't think he did, for with all his weaknesses he was always truthful and transparent—he had made himself known to no one, and so he will never be missed, and I am safe, come what may."

Yet, notwithstanding these comforting reflections, he felt very miserable and ill at ease. He had done a deed which, even in thought, he had always recoiled from. There was blood upon his hands, which all the waters of the great ocean that he heard moaning and sobbing through all the night could never wash away. Several times

through the night he felt tempted to steal out of the house, and go again to that fatal spot on the cliff, and listen for any sounds of life. He knew it was an absurd idea; but the night seemed so horribly long and still, even the moaning of the sea seemed to make the silence more awful and oppressive.

Once or twice he went to the window and threw it open. It was a clear, still, starlit night. All around lay the quiet fields, and beyond the dark line of cliffs stretched away into infinite distance the dark and solemn sea, and every now and then a low moan came up from its heaving bosom, as though it had some dread secret it longed to declare.

"I wish the wind would get up," he said to himself, "and put an end to this horrid stillness. I feel as though I were locked up in a tomb."

But the wind slumbered on, and the silence mocked his fears, and filled him with a nameless alarm.

As soon as the day began to dawn, he got up and dressed himself, and soon after stole quietly out of the house. It was his invariable custom, when staying at Cliff Farm, to have a ramble in the fields each morning before breakfast. Hence, no one would be surprised at his getting up a little earlier than usual, or would question him as to where he had been.

He turned his back upon the sea as soon as he got out of the house, and directed his steps toward a plantation of firs about a mile in the distance.

He had often sought its shelter when the sun was hot, and enjoyed lying on the moss and bracken, listening to the swish of the wind making dreamy music among the pine needles high above his head.

The morning was oppressively still, for no one was stirring yet—at least, no one was out of doors. Here and there, from the chimneys of cottages, perched on the hill-sides, blue lines of smoke began to ascend through the still morning air, showing that the farm labourers were preparing for their morning's meal, and would soon be going forth to their toil.

"I am safe from observation yet," he said to himself, as he left the path he had been pursuing, and turned into another that struck across the fields nearly at right angles. He had not gone many yards, however, ere he changed his course again. He had now his back to the plantation and his face towards the sea.

"I shall have to go and look," he said to himself. "I am like Eugene Aram—I cannot keep away from the fatal spot. Perhaps I shall see the body lying stranded upon the rocks."

A quarter of an hour's brisk walking, and he was standing on the edge of the cliffs, scanning with eager eye the dark rocks below.

The tide was coming in again, slowly and almost imperceptibly. The narrow shingly beach was already covered, and the long rollers were breaking on the rocks with mournful music, solemn as a funeral dirge.

Once or twice, as he looked and listened, he thought he heard a low moan as of some one in pain. Could it be, he thought, that his victim was not dead, but was lying mortally wounded on the rocks below.

"No, no, that cannot be," he said to himself. "All those rocks were covered at the last tide, and if he reached the rocks alive he would be drowned by the rising water."

But as he scanned the face of the cliff it hardly seemed possible that anyone, falling from the top, could reach the bottom alive. It was true the precipice at this place, was not nearly so perpendicular as in some other parts. Yet it was exceedingly steep and serrated, with deep fissures crossing it in all directions, and sharp pinnacles and narrow ledges, from which a body would bound with terrific force, and with fatal consequences.

"I may as well make my mind easy," he muttered.

"He's as dead as a coffin nail, without a doubt, and yet I can scarcely realise that I have actually killed him. It's an awful thought when one comes to reflect upon it quietly. I am afraid the memory of this will darken all my life."

He turned away from the dread place after awhile, and directed his steps once more toward the farm-house, muttering to himself as he did so, "I will come and have another look a little after noon. The tide will be out then, and the beach will be exposed to view."

Mrs. Juliff greeted him with auxious enquiries as to the state of his health, and how he had slept during the night, all of which he answered readily enough, and to her evident satisfaction.

He informed her that he slept so well during the early part of the night that he awoke fresh as a lark soon after daybreak, and, feeling no inclination for further sleep, had been out for a ramble in the fields.

"You don't look quite right about the eyes yet," she said.

"No, very likely not," he answered; "those distressing headaches always leave traces of pain behind them. But

I am much better, and shall be quite right before the day is out."

He had very little appetite for breakfast, and was scarcely able to swallow a morsel. But Pincher, the sheep dog, was quite ready to eat his share, and when Mrs. Juliff came to clear the table, she congratulated her lodger on making such a good meal.

Directly after lunch he directed his steps once more towards the cliffs. The place seemed to have an irresistible fascination for him, and he made up his mind to return to London on the morrow that he might be out of the reach of its baleful influence.

He found the tide at its lowest ebb, and the rocks standing high and dry above the shingle. But nothing that bore any semblance of a human body could he discover in any direction. "I expect he was washed out with the tide," he said to himself. "So much the better. It's a comfort he will never trouble anybody any more."

But in spite of this reflection he was very miserable. He found that his conscience, though seared, was not dead; and wherever he looked, whether on sea or sky, the word "Murderer," seemed written in letters of light and fire.

"Had I reflected a moment," he said to himself, "I should never have done it. And I should have been happier if I had taken my chance with Ada. I believe she would have been true to me, even though she knew he was alive."

But it was too late now for regrets. The fatal deed was done, and he would have to bear the burden of an accusing conscience as well as he could. Late in the afternoon he dressed himself with his usual care, and directed his steps towards Trevena. Ada was on the look-out for him, and was quite prepared for his coming.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A BOATING ADVENTURE.

E must now return to the previous afternoon.

Ada had scarcely finished dinner when, glancing through the window, she espied Madge Tregony bounding across the lawn. Instantly Ada rose from her chair and went and threw open the French window, and Madge came into the room, bright as morning's sunshine, and fresh as a summer breeze.

"It's just glorious out of doors, Ada," she said. "The sea is as quiet as a pool, and the air as sweet as May. It seems a shame to stay indoors on such a glorious evening, and so I have come to drag you out for a little exercise."

"How kind of you," said Ada, laughing. "Do I look as if I should need much dragging?"

"No, you look as if you would enjoy a scamper over the downs or a pull in the bay as much as I should, only I thought somebody might be coming, you know." And Madge looked at her slyly out of the corner of her eye.

"If somebody comes, he can wait," said Ada; "but I am not aware that anyone is coming this evening."

"So much the better—we shall not have to hurry back; but let us decide before we start whether it is to be a ramble on the downs or a sail on the sea."

"Oh, let's go for a sail," said Ada. "It is not often the sea is so calm as it is to-night, and I enjoy rocking and dreaming on the water in the quiet of the evening."

"You sentimental creature," said Madge, with a laugh. "But go and get your things on, and let's waste no more time in chatter."

"I had better go and tell Sam to go down and get the boat out, first," said Ada.

"No, I'll do that," said Madge; "and in the meantime you can be getting ready."

A quarter of an hour later Ada was sitting in the stern of the boat, holding the rudder-lines, while Madge was pulling steadily at the oars. No inland lake could have been more placid than was the great ocean that evening. Outside the little land-locked harbour there was just a perceptible swell, like the heaving bosom of a great monster in his sleep.

When clear of the headland Ada hoisted a little sail, and for an hour they slowly drifted before an imperceptible breeze in the direction of St. Tivey. Neither Ada nor Madge seemed in the humour for conversation. Rocking idly on the slowly-heaving bosom of the deep, they gave themselves up to reflection. Ada's thoughts were still of Jack. With a woman's intuition, she had jumped to the conclusion that John Robinson was none other than her old lover, and nothing could drive the idea from her mind. She knew as well as anyone that she was building her hopes on a very slender foundation, and that she had ab solutely no evidence on which to base her faith, and for

that reason she kept her thoughts to herself, and cherished her hope in secret.

But the hope was none the less sweet on that account, though the waiting and longing day after day began to tell upon her spirits, and banish some of the brightness from her conversation.

"Will he come, or has he forgotten me! Does he love me still, or has he transferred his affections to another?" were some of the questions she was debating with herself, when Madge suddenly called her attention to something white on the rocks close to the foot of the cliffs.

"Is it not a signal of some kind, Ada?" Madge said.

"I can't make it out," was the reply. "It looks as if it might be a white pocket-handkerchief waved by someone."

"It's that, you may depend," said Madge. "Some mussel-gatherer, perhaps, has been caught by the tide; let's pull in that direction with all speed."

Instantly Madge got her oars to work again, and the boat was soon gliding rapidly towards the cliffs.

"Yes it's a signal of distress," said Ada at length. "I tan see a man very plainly waving a white pocket-hand-kerchief."

At this, Madge redoubled her efforts, and the boat went skimming like an arrow across the waters.

A few minutes more and the boat was among the breakers, while reaches of foamy water wound in and out among the rocky islets, and navigation became an exceedingly difficult matter. Now and then they lost sight of the distress signal, as some huge rock loomed up to the right or left, and once or twice they were almost stranded on the jagged rocks.

"This is a risky business," said Madge at length; "if it were not getting so late, it would be policy to go back to Trevena, and send some fishermen to the rescue."

"No, that won't do," said Ada; "it would be dark before they could get here."

"Oh, we are all right," Madge said, after a pause, "here is fairly open water again."

The next moment Ada was standing up in the boat and calling to the unfortunate man, but she got no answer, while the handkerchief had ceased to wave.

"He has fainted, or else he's dead," Madge replied, for they were now almost close to the rock on which he was reclining, his white face upturned to the sky.

"Pull close up to the rock," said Ada, excitedly, "I can easily reach him."

"Why, what is the matter with you?" Madge asked, looking up in alarm.

"Don't ask me any questions," Ada replied, with blanched lips; "only be quick. There, there, that will do; hold her steady a moment." The next moment she had sprung from the boat, and was climbing swiftly over the jagged rocks. In less time than it takes to write it she had reached the unfortunate man, and was sitting down with his head resting upon her knee, while her hot tears fell like rain upon his brow.

"Oh, that I had something to revive him," she murmured, passionately; then suddenly she recollected her smelling salts.

In less than a moment she had the stopper off, and was holding it under his nose. It had the desired effect. After a violent sneeze, he opened his eyes and looked up into Ada's face with a strange and bewildered expression,

but the bewilderment soon gave place to a look of recognition, and, with a happy smile, he whispered, "Ada, my darling!" then closed his eyes again.

"Oh, Jack, are you much hurt?" she asked in trembling tones; "are you able to talk to me?"

"I shall be better directly," he whispered; "how good of you to come to my rescue."

"I think God must have sent me," she said; "but how did you get here?"

"I cannot answer that now," he said; "some day, perhaps, I will tell you."

"Were you coming to see me?" she asked, eagerly.

"Yes, I was," he replied, with a smile, opening his eyes again.

"Oh, I knew you would come," she said, exultingly. "Ever since I read that in the papers, I knew you would come."

"Have you been reading about me in the papers?" he asked.

"I think so," she answered. "John Robinson and Jack Formby are the same, are they not?'

He smiled for an answer, but it was quite sufficient.

"And now, how am I to get you into the boat?" she asked; "I wish I were strong enough to carry you."

"I shall be able to manage directly," he said. "I am not much hurt, I think; but I am very faint and exhausted."

"Can you walk at all?" she asked, anxiously.

"Yes, I think so," he said; "if not, I will crawl. I have been walking along the face of this cliff during the afternoon; so, you see, I am not to be deterred by trifles."

"What an adventure," she said, looking up at the jagged heights above her.

"Worse even than yours in Boggart Clough," he said, with a smile; and without waiting for her to reply, he raised himself to his feet, and made an effort to walk. He found it very much easier, however, to crawl on hands and knees, and, in that way, with some considerable assistance from Ada, he managed to reach the boat.

Madge had been waiting in a perfect fever of impatience, for twilight was deepening apace, and she remembered how difficult and dangerous it was to steer the boat among the rocks. But she forgot all about the danger, when Ada said to her eagerly, as Jack was getting painfully down over the rocks,

"Madge, this is Mr. Jack Formby."

She was too astonished to reply, and could only stare in blank bewilderment. A hundred thoughts and surmises seemed to flash simultaneously through her mind, and a suspicion of the truth shot across her brain like a ray of light, and almost turned her giddy.

But she kept her suspicions to herself, and helped Jack into the boat with a firm and steady hand.

It was nearly dark by the time they had got clear of the rocks, and then Madge pulled steadily for home. Very few words were spoken during the journey. Each was busy with his or her own thoughts, and so perhaps this will be the most fitting place to tell how Jack escaped with his life.

To one simple circumstance this was owing. He fell, as the reader will remember, feet foremost, and with his face towards the cliff. As drowning men will grasp a straw, so a falling man will clutch eagerly at whatever

may be within his reach; and hence Jack's head had scarcely disappeared over the cliff when his hands eagerly clutched a ragged point of rock, which he held fast with all his might.

As we have before stated, the cliff was not perpendicular, and to any one with a steady head and nerve a way down to the beach was by no means an impossibility.

With great care Jack worked his way round the rock which he was holding to a hollow under, or, more correctly, in the cliff, where, on a broad ledge of rock, he was able to rest while quite invisible from the top.

When he had somewhat recovered from the shock he began to reconnoitre. The easiest thing would be to climb to the surface, but the fear of meeting Ralph a second time drove that idea out of his head.

He knew that the beach would be exposed at low water, and so he resolved to work his way along the face of the cliff steadily downward, and in this way he would be able, he thought, to reach the bottom in safety.

It was a perilous undertaking, he knew, but it was his only chance, and so he resolved to risk it. With infinite caution he worked his way downward, and much more rapidly than he expected.

When within a dozen feet of where Ada found him his foot slipped, and so he concluded his descent much more rapidly than was either safe or pleasant. Indeed, the result of this one false step proved to be a fractured rib and a severely sprained ankle.

Sam the gardener was on the look-out for the return of the boat long before it hove into sight, and by his aid Jack reached Trevena House without attracting any attention. Madge called on Dr. Pendray on her way to the Vicarage, and requested him to go on to Trevena House without delay.

At Jack's very earnest request all concerned promised to say nothing of the evening's occurrence till two or three days had passed away, a promise which in every case was honourably kept.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A CANDID ANSWER.

ALPH FORMBY had no idea of the surprise that was in store for him at Trevena House, or he would have paused ere he rang the door bell. Ada, seeing him coming from an upstairs window, came down into the hall to greet him, and at once ushered him into the dining-room, where Jack, looking white and exhausted, reclined on a large sofa, and Madge Tregony and Dr. Pendray sat near, engaged in animated conversation.

Ralph was delighted at seeing Ada so bright and animated. She was dressed all in white, for the weather, as we have stated, was warm and sultry, and he thought he had never seen her look more sweet and beautiful than she did that afternoon.

Her greeting was very warm and friendly, for she had no suspicion of the truth, and just now she was so happy in the realisation of her long-cherished hope, that had Ralph been a beggar she would have welcomed him with a smile, and sent him away rejoicing. He seemed a little bit surprised when she led the way past the cosy old drawing-room and threw open the dining-room door.

"I have an old friend here," she said, looking up at him with one of her sweetest smiles.

He scarcely heeded her words, so intoxicated was he with her smile; for if there was anyone in the world he loved equal to himself it was Ada. Indeed, he believed that for the first time in his life, he was really and truly in love; and sometimes tried to persuade himself—though not with much success—that it was Ada alone he cared for, and not her money.

Dr. Pendray rose at once when the door was thrown open, and waited for the visitor, whoever he or she might be, to enter. Ralph entered with a firm and stately step, grasped Dr. Pendray's hand warmly, not noticing the figure on the sofa. He then turned to Madge and advanced a step to greet her, holding out his hand at the same time. The next moment his eye fell upon Jack, who from his quiet corner was watching the scene with a curious twinkle in his eye.

Instantly Ralph stopped short in the middle of the room, while a look of horror swept across his face. For a few moments he stared at Jack as though his eyes would start out of their sockets, then staggered backwards and to all appearance would have fallen had not Dr. Pendray caught him by the arm, while his face, and even lips, became perfectly livid.

"This is—this is—" he gasped.

"An unexpected meeting," said Jack quietly.

"It is!" he said, staring excitedly round the room. Then seeing the door standing wide open, he made a rush for it, and seizing hat and stick, which were in the hall, he strode out of the house, and before either Ada or her visitors could recover from their astonishment, he had completely vanished.

That was the last ever seen of Ralph Formby in Cornwall. He did not wait to go to Cliff Farm for his portmanteau, but rushed straight away to the railway station, and caught the earliest train to London.

After he had left Trevena House, Ada's visitors stared at one another, and then at her, but no one seemed prepared to volunteer any remark. Madge looked curiously at Jack, as though she would read his secret, but he was not to be drawn.

At length Dr. Pendray ventured the remark, "Your cousin seemed hardly pleased at meeting you, Mr. Formby?"

"My presence evidently came upon him as a surprise,"
Jack said.

"I thought he would be pleased to find you were still living," Ada said.

But Jack did not reply.

"Had you met before?" Madge asked abruptly.

Jack blushed, and looked uneasy, then answered, "Suppose we change the subject; it is scarcely fair to discuss an acquaintance behind his back."

At this Madge laughed outright, but threw a glance at Jack at the same time, as much as to say, "You cannot put me off in that way; I have my suspicions, and I shall find out yet."

While Jack remained at Trevena House, Madge kept Ada company; but she was careful to disturb the lovers' tête-à-têtes as little as possible.

Ada was not long in discovering that Jack loved her

still; and he had scarcely need to be told that her heart was all his own. He found her more beautiful, more womanly than when he went away; and all his old passion surged back like a flood at the first sight of her face.

"How strange," he said, a few days later, "that you should have found me in the way you did."

"Not more strange," she answered, "than that you should have found me in Boggart Clough."

"Oh, yes; I think so," he replied, "for I went there on purpose to find you."

"And I found you without seeking," she said, with a laugh.

"And you were glad to see me, Ada?" and he took her hand in his.

"I cannot tell you how glad," she replied.

"I came back," he said, "with fear and trembling. I have been trying during all those years to redeem in some measure the past."

"And you have done it nobly."

"Scarcely that, but I have learned to labour and to wait."

"Will you tell me all the story of your struggle and triumph?" she asked.

"Some day, if you will care to listen, but the story is a very long one."

"And did you never lose hope ?"

"Not every hope. I lost the great hope with which you inspired me. When I was in Liverpool, for instance, I never expected a meeting like this."

"And what inspired you?"

"The memory of the past and the love of right."

"And you forgot me?"

- "Forgot you, Ada? No, never; your presence was always with me by night and day, and the memory of your words to do my duty for duty's sake, was a constant stimulus."
- "And if you had not succeeded you would not have come back again?"
- "Oh, no; you would scarcely have cared to have admitted a navvy into your drawing-room."

"I would have admitted you if you were in rags."

He smiled at her sweetly, then answered, "I often wondered what sort of reception I should get."

- "And are you satisfied with it?" she asked.
- "Oh, yes, quite; and now may I ask a question of you?"
 - "Yes; twenty if you like."
 - "And will you give me a candid answer?"
 - "Yes; I will promise that."
 - "Then are you satisfied with me?"
 - "Quite."
 - "And I may venture to---?"
 - "Yes; you may."
- "My darling," and for awhile no other words were spoken, but the moments that followed were the most blissful of their lives.
- "I have promised to be Jack's wife," Ada said to Madge as they sat together that evening after Jack had retired.
- "Did you only promise to-day?" asked Madge, in surprise.
 - "No; I could not promise till he asked me."
- "Well, I thought he would ask the first day of his arrival," said Madge, laughingly.

"But you know he is cautious, like Dr. Pendray, and he wanted to be sure before he asked again."

"Well, I'm glad you've promised, anyway," said Madge, "for I think he is just splendid."

"Equal to the Doctor ?"

"I will not say that," said Madge, with a blush; "still I am sure he is very true and noble. What a mercy he came back in time."

"My life has been full of mercies," Ada answered, reverently; "and I am so happy just now, that I feel quite undeserving of such joy."

Dr. Pendray was very attentive to Jack, coming twice, and even three times a day. But our hero was not long in discovering the secret of this.

"I owe it to your friend, Miss Tregony, that the doctor looks after me so well, I think," Jack said to Ada, as they sat together one morning in the breakfast-room.

"Oh, yes, there is no doubt of that," she answered, smilingly. "I believe, in his case, it was love at first sight."

"Has he been here long?" Jack asked.

"About a year. He came fresh from college to succeed Doctor Polwheal, who died last year."

"He's a fine young fellow, at any rate," Jack answered.
"I should get quite jealous of him, did I not know that he was in love with Miss Tregony."

"No, you wouldn't," Ada answered, laying her little white hand across his mouth; "you would never get jealous of anyone."

"And why not?"

"Because "

"Well, because what?"

- "Oh, I don't think I will tell you."
- "Oh, yes, you must tell me, or I shall get jealous in reality."
- "Then, because you have such a good opinion of your-self."
- "Oh, no, I'm not going to have that. You are just evading the question."
 - "Am I ?"
 - "Yes. Now what is the true answer?"
 - "Because Jack has such a good opinion of me."
- "You are right there, darling," he answered, with a happy smile.
- "And because he knows that I love him so truly, and can never love anyone else."
 - "Does he know that?"
 - "If he doesn't he must be very dull."
 - "Which he always was."
- "Which point I will not argue," she said, laughing. "But I often think how dull I was when I first knew you."
 - "Why, my darling."
 - "For so misjudging you," she answered.
 - "Did you misjudge me?"
- "Indeed I did. I thought you were incorrigibly idle and hopelessly apathetic."
 - "And don't you think that now ?"
- "No, I think my Jack is one of the bravest men that ever breathed. Only a true hero could have done what he has during the last four or five years."
- "Hush, my darling," he answered, "if I don't get jealous, you will make me vain."
- "I am not afraid of that, either," she answered. "Honest praise is not flattery."

But we need not pursue the conversation further. Jack felt that it was worth being thrown over the cliff, to have such a loving nurse to wait upon him day by day.

Indeed, he declared that it was so nice to be petted and waited upon, that he should not be in the least hurry to get well; while Madge gave it as her opinion that he had not got hurt at all, but was playing the "old soldier" from the first.

So the days sped on like a happy dream. Jack preserved an unbroken silence respecting Ralph, and Ada was so unsuspicious that she never thought of connecting the latter with Jack's accident. Madge, however, was not to be hoodwinked, and communicated her suspicions to the doctor, though both preserved a discreet silence upon the subject. But though Jack said nothing, he thought a great deal. It was clear to him, now, that all Ralph's professed friendship, in the years gone by, was but a blind, and a piece of bare-faced hypocrisy. The mystery of the forged receipt was now quite clear. Ralph had secured him the situation at Brown and Toadsby's with a deliberate purpose. Evidently, from the first, it was his object to get him out of the way. He regarded him as his rival, and, if he could succeed in blasting his character, he would gain his purpose.

The diabolical villainy of the whole proceeding was of a piece with his latest act. Yet he was not sorry that he had allowed him to escape. There was no feeling of revenge in his heart. Ralph had sought to compass his ruin, yet so far everything had worked together for his good.

"He has harmed himself more than he has harmed me," he said to himself; "and more than that, the old Book has taught me not to be overcome of evil, but to overcome evil with good."

The excitement of the time; the shock of his nerves; the joy of finding Ada; the bliss of requited love, together with the pleasure and the pain of being an invalid and of being so tenderly nursed, drove all thought of his uncle out of Jack's mind.

But one afternoon, while sitting alone in the drawing-room, the brief conversation he had with Ralph on the cliff, shot across his mind like a flash of light.

"No," he said to himself; "it was not a dream. He distinctly told me that my uncle John had returned from Australia, and finding that I had neither seen him or Ada, and that none of my old friends knew that I was alive, I suppose he thought he might kill me without exciting any suspicion. Well, he has failed, thank Heaven for that."

That very same evening he wrote to his uncle, and the next day he got a telegram to the following effect:—"I am starting tor Cornwall right away."

CHAPTER XXXV.

"BE HAPPY WHILE YOU CAN."

AD our hero been John Formby's son, the latter could not have hailed the tidings of his safety with greater manifestations of delight. Scarcely giving himself time to crush a change of raiment into his portmanteau, he hurried away to catch the earliest train to the south. Like everyone else he had nearly given up all hopes of ever finding Jack alive; yet the bitterness of his disappointment no one knew. He had come to England mainly for Jack's sake; he had determined to make his nephew his heir, and when he discovered that Jack was missing, he resolved to leave no stone unturned in his efforts to find him. He was not the man to quail before difficulties or to lose hope, while the remotest possibility of success remained. From what he could gather of Jack's character, he scouted the idea that "the lad" would commit suicide.

"The young rascal has evidently some grit in him, and is fighting his way somewhere," was his reflection; "and so I'll wait, and keep my weather eye open, at the same time."

He had never been able to "fathom" Ralph, to use his own expression. He had watched him narrowly from time to time, and had made inquiries respecting his character amongst those who knew him best, but the result was by no means satisfactory.

"I hardly know whether the fellow is a saint or a villain," he said to himself. "Anyhow, I don't 'freeze' to him, as the Yankees say; and I shall have to know him better before I trust him."

What surprised him most was that Ralph did not appear to concern himself about the matter.

"If the fellow cared about my money," he reflected, "he would surely try to worm his way into my favour: but, instead of that, he treats me with cool indifference. There surely must be something at the bottom of all this."

But whatever might be at the bottom, he was unable to discover it; and so he waited and hoped with growing impatience, and with daily increasing fear.

Hence Jack's letter to him was like a voice from the dead.

"The young rascal has come to the top at last," he exclaimed; "hurrah! here's off."

Jack was lying alone on the sofa, wondering what his uncle was like, when the door-bell rang violently, and a moment later the old gentleman was ushered into the room.

"God bless my soul!" he shouted, nearly shaking Jack's hand off at the same time; "thou'rt the very image of thy father."

"Am I?" said Jack, with a smile.

"Thou art, lad; thou'rt a real Formby, and I am as glad as if somebody had left me a fortune that I've found thee."

"And I'm glad I've found you," said Jack; "for I'm sure we shall be friends."

"Friends! I should think we shall be. Why, boj I've been searching all England over for thee."

"I wish I had known," said Jack.

"Well, perhaps it's best as it is; for thou hast had to fight thy own battle without aid from any one."

"That is true, uncle."

"So much the better; but thou'lt be able to settle down as a gentleman now, for I have brass enough for both."

"I was not cut out for a gentleman," said Jack. "Besides that, I have just signed a contract, that will last me a year and half at least."

"A contract, eh? Well, I'm glad of that, too. I don't like idlers and drones, upon my soul I don't. But let's hear all about it."

So Jack took his uncle into his confidence, and gave him an outline of what he had done since his father's death."

"Boy," said the old man, with tears in his eyes, "thou'rt real grit, upon my soul, thou art. But suppose we go into partnership. I know all about this kind of work, and I can find the brass as well. What dost say, lad? I want something to do. 'Formby and Formby, Contractors': that will sound very well."

"I shall be delighted," Jack answered; and so the matter was settled during the first hour of their acquaintance.

Ada has seen John Formby before, and so they met, not as strangers, but as old friends. She wanted him to stay as her guest at Trevena House, but he would not hear of it, and so it ended in his taking the rooms lately occupied by Ralph at Cliff Farm, where he was joined by Jack as soon as the doctor's permission could be obtained.

Jack's sprained ankle caused him a great deal of trouble, and he had to use a crutch for nearly three months. But he never complained; he felt that his mercies far outweighed his misfortunes, and a quiet hour with Ada made him forget all his pain.

The summer died away into autumn as gently as the morning star melts into the light of heaven. The evenings were delicious and the sunsets glorious; and while Jack and Ada, together with the doctor and Madge, would be quietly rambling over the "downs," or skimming gently over the placid waters of the bay, "Uncle John" and the vicar might be seen smoking their pipes together in the garden, the former entertaining his host with stories of adventure in the Australian bush.

Nothing was heard of Ralph or his doings till nearly Christmas. He had kept quiet many weeks, much wondering what action Jack would take. But finding that he made no effort to punish him, nor, as far as he could learn, even hinted at the struggle on the cliff, he began to breathe freely again, and set to work with diligence to replenish his sadly-drained coffers.

In the meanwhile, however, matters between him and Toadsby had been coming to a head. A few hints from the latter led to an inquiry into the workings of the "National Federation" and other kindred schemes.

At the first hint of what was coming, Ralph tried to

escape out of the country, but was arrested at Southampton and brought to Bodelford for trial. The revelations at that trial were very painful to all concerned. Generous people saw how they had been duped in the name of religion and philanthropy, and vowed they would never subscribe again to any charitable institution, and so the innocent suffered because of the guilty, and deserving objects were allowed to languish because this man had so successfully played the rogue.

During the severe cross-examination to which he was subjected, Ralph admitted that he forged the receipt that lost Jack his situation, but declared that Toadsby supplied him with the form and pocketed the money. The general conclusion was that both Toadsby and Ralph were rogues, and that Jack's name and character had been cleared from every stain.

Indeed, so deeply was this felt, that some time after, Jack was entertained at a banquet by the leading citizens of Bodelford, and toasted in the most eulogistic and complimentary terms possible, while the leading newspaper devoted two columns to a sketch of his life since the day his father was found dead in his office, and held him up as a triumph of honesty and perseverance, and as a pattern for all young men.

Ralph was sentenced to eighteen months' imprisonment, with hard labour, and that was the last heard of him for many years.

Early in the spring, Jack and Ada were married, and, after a happy month in Italy, they returned to Trevena House, where "Uncle John" promised to reside with them, and in which a room had been set apart for his exclusive use.

Jack had found his heart's idol and his heart's content; and Ada, happy in the love and protection of a noble husband, gave herself again to generous deeds and became more truly than ever the Lady Bountiful of the place.

A few weeks after Ada's marriage, old Squire Netherby died, and Dick and his wife returned to Netherby Hall. This was just the opportunity that "Uncle John" had been waiting for, and after a good deal of persuasion Dick was induced to sell Ryecroft and to allow it to return again to the possession of the Formbys. And so the first summer after his marriage, Jack found himself again in the home of his childhood, and amid those pleasant surroundings that would ever remain dear to his heart.

"Ada, my darling, it seems like old times to be out on the hills and moors again," Jack said to her, one breezy day, as they skirted the heathery moors, arm in arm.

"Oh, Jack," she said, with swimming eyes, "this is beyond my happiest dream."

"This is the place," he said, after a pause, "where I stole my first kiss, do you remember it, my darling?"

"As if I could ever forget," she answered, with a smile.

"Then I will kiss you here again," he said, suiting the action to the word.

"You were lover, then," she said, with a happy smile: "you are my husband now."

And for answer he gave her another kiss, and then they walked on in silence.

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Many years have passed since that day. Jack is Sir John Formby now, and young Tom Lashton has succeeded his father to the baronetcy, which that gentleman received

shortly before his death. Two closer friends do not exist than Jack and Tom; nor two more successful business men.

Uncle John is still living, and able to render valuable assistance to our hero in his work, while Jack's children idolise the old gentleman, and are never tired of hearing stories of Australian life and adventure.

Ralph is in New Zealand, and by all accounts is trying to live an honest life. Jack found him one day in the snow, ragged, shoeless, and almost famished, and brought him into the house, and fed and clothed him.

He seemed greatly touched by Jack's kindness, and looking across to Ada, he said brokenly, "You have a noble husband."

- "A nobler does not breathe," she answered warmly.
- "I tried to kill him," he said abruptly.
- "To kill him?" she said, in astonishment.
- "Yes! I pushed him over the cliff; did he never tell you?"
- "No!" she exclaimed, looking eagerly from Ralph to her husband.
- "We will let bye-gones be bye-gones, Ralph," Jack answered. "God has made all things work together for my good, and you were not yourself, that day."
- "God knows I was not," he said brokenly, "and it has been a heavy burden on my conscience ever since."
- "We will say no more about the past," Jack said, "let us think of the future; what do you propose to do?"
- "I hardly know," was the answer. "I think sometimes if I could get out of England I might have a chance."
- "Well, I will make you an offer," Jack said. "I will give you two hundred pounds if you will start at once."

Ralph could only stare dumbly at the speaker. He was too astonished to reply. Needless to say, however, that Jack's offer was accepted, and the next day saw him in Liverpool on board a sailing vessel bound for Melbourne.

He has written to Jack about twice a year ever since, and according to his own account he is doing well.

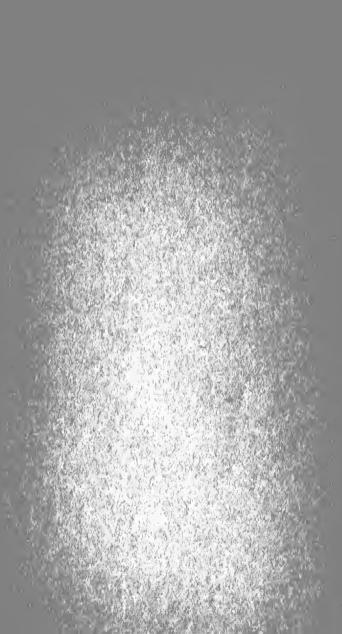
Kate Netherby is still unmarried, and to all appearance is likely to remain so. The firm of Brown and Toadsby has long since ceased to exist. Brown has gone over to the great majority. Toadsby, in common parlance, has gone to the dogs.

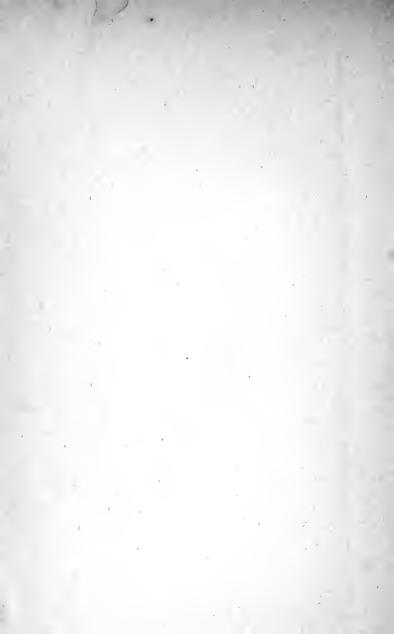
The vicar of Trevena is living still, but Madge no longer keeps his house. She has been Mrs. Pendray these many years, and when Ada and Jack are at Trevena their children play together on the beach and dig holes in the sand.

There is really no necessity that Jack should work any more, for he has amassed a larger fortune than either he or his children will ever spend. But he says he can't help doing a little, work has become second nature with him, and if he had nothing to do he would sink into the blues and die.

Ada says he is not hurt with what he does, and as she knows he is always happier when he is doing something, her advice to him is, "Be happy, Jack, as long as you can."

THE END.





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